



HIOUEN-THSANG IN INDIA

HIOUEN-THSANG IN INDIA

by

J. BARTHELEMY SAINT-HILAIRE

Translated from the French by

LAURA ENSOR



SUSIL GUPTA (INDIA) LIMITED

FIRST EDITION 1952

**Durga Sah Municipal Library,
NAINITAL.**

दुर्गासाह म्युनिसिपल लाईब्रेरी
नैनीताल

Class No. ५३४

Book No. S² 35 H

Received on ... May ... 1956

PUBLISHED BY SUSIL GUPTA (INDIA) LTD., 52/9, BOW-
BAZAR STREET, CALCUTTA 12 AND PRINTED BY
B. K. SEN AT THE MODERN INDIA PRESS, 7, WELLING-
TON SQ., CALCUTTA.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

Life of Hiouen-Tsang. The importance of his travels in India; his monastic education in China; his vocation as a missionary; his departure; first trials. The King of the Qigurs, the Turkish Khan. Hiouen-Tsang's arrival in India; his superstitious piety; exploration on the banks of the Ganges; five years' sojourn in Magadha and the convent of Nālanda; travels throughout the peninsula; return to Nālanda; Silāditya; contest of the Master of the Law against the Little Vehicle. His return to China after sixteen years' absence; Hiouen-Tsang's retreat; translation of the sacred Buddhist books; death of Hiouen-Tsang; his character .. 1

CHAPTER II

Memoirs of Hiouen-Tsang. Sources from which the Si-yu-ki is derived. History in India and China. Descriptive method of Hiouen-Tsang. His general views on India; his itinerary in Magadha; a page from his Memoirs on the Convent of Nālanda. Testimony of Hiouen-Tsang as to the Buddha, the Nirvāna, the Councils, and the kings of his day. Hiouen-Tsang at the Court of Silāditya, king of Kanyākubja and part of Central India. The great Council of the Deliverance in the Field of Happiness. Distribution of royal alms. Surprising tolerance of the Hindus 15

CHAPTER III

Buddhist worship in India in the seventh century of the Christian era: its simplicity, worship of statues, the important part they play in Buddhism. Moving or flying statues, miraculous cures; relics of the Tathāgata and other saintly personages. Imprints of the Buddha's footsteps. The Maitreya Bodhisatwa. Absence of organization among the Indian Buddhist monks. Relation of Buddhism with Brahmanism in the seventh century. Buddhism divided into two sects: the Little and the Great Vehicle. Relation of the two principal sects; subordination of the Little Vehicle; its secondary sects. Course of Buddhist studies at the time of Hiouen-Thsang. His intercourse with illustrious learned men. Summary of Indian Buddhism .. 8

PUBLISHERS' NOTE

THIS volume is an extract from the author's larger work *Buddhism In India* and deals in particular with the biography and memoirs of Hiouen-Tsang, the famous Chinese pilgrim who travelled in India before the Musalman conquest when this country was exclusively Brahmanist and Buddhist.

The book gives a picture of the condition of Buddhism in India in the middle of the seventh century of the christian era and concludes with a summary of Indian Buddhism.

CHAPTER I

HIOUEN-THSANG's travels are known by two works, which that excellent sinologist Stanislas Julien has translated from the Chinese into French: one is the *Histoire de sa vie et de ses voyages*, by two of his disciples, Hoëi-Li and Yen-Thsong; the other is a collection of Hiouen-Thsang's own Memoirs on the western countries he travelled over for sixteen consecutive years. By western countries India is more especially understood, as it is in fact situated to the west of China.

By the help of these two authentic documents, we will study Buddhism as it existed in the Indian peninsula twelve hundred years after the Nirvāna of the Tathāgata, and about four hundred years before the invasion of the Moslem.

However, in order thoroughly to appreciate Hiouen-Thsang we must consider his position, not only among the five or six heads of missions whom he imitated and surpassed, or who followed him, but in the general effect of that great movement which, for so many centuries, incited all Buddhist China towards India. Facts and records of all kinds attest uninterruptedly and with undeniable authenticity that this movement, which still exists, was of national importance. Hiouen-Thsang, in the seventh century of the Christian era, assisted it as much as lay in his power; but he only followed it and took his part, after or before many others.

It appears certain that two hundred and seventeen years before Christ, a Sramana had first penetrated into the Chinese Empire, and had brought thither the germ of the new religion. This event, recorded in the Chinese Annals,¹ proves that Buddhism, as might be supposed, had its apostles, and that the missionary spirit, of which the Buddha himself

¹ Rémusat, *Foe Koué Ki*, p. 41, and Landresse, preface to *Foe Koué Ki*, p. 38.

had given the example, was not wanting to this religion more than to any other. Proselytism is a duty when it is believed that men can be saved by a truth already in our possession; and this is one of the most noble if not the most justifiable pretensions of Buddhism.

However, China was not destined to receive Buddhism nor to see it propagated by the apostles who came from India. This nation, which seems to do everything in an inverted order, far from waiting for the religious faith to be brought to it, went to seek for it in foreign lands. It was as it were proselytism reversed. The Chinese pilgrims, for they cannot be called missionaries, went to India, some thousand miles from their own country, to imbibe a purer dogma or to revive a failing faith. It was necessary to do this several times, and during six centuries there were constant pilgrimages carried on, with more or less success.

This is certainly a unique fact in the history of religions, and it would seem that no other example can be quoted in the annals of humanity; for if we take two of the best known, Christianity and Mohammedanism, we find that both have been propagated in the opposite manner. Christianity, which sprang from an obscure corner of Judea, was spread by missions and preaching over the Greco-Roman world, which it soon subjugated. Through its apostles it conquered by degrees the barbarians in different parts of Europe, and at the present day it is still through its missionaries that it seeks to carry its benefits to the uttermost parts of the globe, and more especially to China. But the nations were never converted, nor was their Christianity strengthened by returning to the spot from whence Christianity had issued; even the crusades, admirable as they were, did not attempt this object; and Europe did not free the Holy Sepulchre from the Saracens in order to learn more about the faith it professed. As for Mohammedanism, it was propagated like the Christian faith, far from the place of its birth. It spread

rapidly and extensively, but the nations converted by force and by the sword never came, to receive its tenets, to the place where the prophet was born. The pilgrimage to Mecca was always an act of piety, never a religious teaching.

The Chinese, therefore, retain this kind of privilege, and the manner in which they appropriated Buddhism to themselves is not the least of their peculiarities.

The first Chinese pilgrim who wrote down his travels in India was Chi-tao'an. He travelled at the beginning of the fourth century, that is about eighty years before Fa-Hian. His book, entitled *Description of the Western Countries*, is probably lost, or at least it has not yet been discovered in the convents, where it possibly remains concealed. It is only known by the very brief mention of it made in encyclopaedias or biographies published some centuries later. The extent of the work is unknown, but Stanislas Julien seems to think its loss is much to be regretted.

The second journey recorded is that of Fa-Hian. His narrative, which has reached us, is famous under the name of *Recollections of the Kingdoms of the Buddha*.² It was a real revelation when, some fifty years ago, Abel Rémusat, aided by Klaproth and Landresse, brought out a translation which gave the first idea of this narrative. However limited this was, it threw a ray of light, and, thanks to the details it contained, it was at once seen, notwithstanding its omissions and defects, what resources such documents afforded. Fa-Hian had travelled fifteen years in India, from the year 399 to the year 414. But he had only travelled over thirty kingdoms, and his intelligence did not equal his courage. His short narrative is obscure by reason of its conciseness. The notes that Abel Rémusat, Klaproth, and Landresse added were not sufficient to render it perfectly intelligible. However, it was already a great work to have taken this glorious

² *Foe Koue Ki*.

initiative, and this first discovery promised many others more fruitful and more complete.

About a hundred years after Fa-Hian, two pilgrims, Hoei-Seng and Sung-Yun, sent to India by order of an empress, wrote a description of their journey, but with even fewer details than Fa-Hian. Ch. Fred. Neumann has translated this account into German in his *Recollections of the Pilgrimages of the Buddhist Monks*.³ Hoei-Seng and Sung-Yun seem more especially to have travelled through the northern parts of India, and they remained two whole years in the Udyāna country.

After these two narratives we come to Hiouen-Thsang's, which is of much greater compass, and in every point infinitely more instructive. This work is entitled *Memoirs on the Western Countries*.⁴ It consists of about 600 pages in quarto in the Chinese text, that is to say it is ten or twelve times longer than that of Fa-Hian. It was honoured by passing through several imperial editions.

To complete the *Memoirs* of Hiouen-Thsang must be mentioned the *History* of his life by his two disciples, who add a quantity of curious facts to the dry statistics of the *Memoirs*.

Between Hiouen-Thang's journey and that of fifty-six monks a hundred years elapse, or at least it was in 730 that a learned man called I-tsing drew up, by virtue of an imperial decree, 'The History and itinerary of the monks of the dynasty of the Thangs, who travelled to the west of China in search of the Law.' This work is rather less extensive than that of Fa-Hian.

Finally, to complete the series of Chinese pilgrimages in India, there is the *Itinerary of Khi-Nie's journey through the Western Countries*. By the emperor's orders Khi-Nie had

³ Sung-Yun's short account will be found translated in Beal's *Fa-Hian*, pp. 174-208. (Translator's note).

⁴ *Si-yu-ki*.

left China in 964 at the head of three hundred Samaneans, and remained absent from his country twelve years. It seems that there only exists a few memoranda of this long journey, not more than eight quarto pages, which a learned man has included in one of his works.

Such is the substance of the narratives by the Chinese pilgrims; and in translating the *Biography* and *Memoirs* of Hiouen-Thsang, Stanislas Julien has given the most interesting portions of these narrations. These two works are far superior to all the others, and in comparing Hiouen-Thsang to his predecessors and his successors, his great superiority over them, both in the extent and in the exactness of his information, is strikingly shown. Hiouen-Thsang was gifted with a real aptitude for this kind of investigation, and had he lived at a different time, and amongst ourselves, he would certainly have been classed among the most learned and illustrious geographers and travellers.

It is true that the days in which he lived were peculiarly favourable to studies of this kind. From political and commercial, as much as from religious reasons, the Chinese emperors of the seventh century, either of the Souï or the Thang dynasties, appear to have taken great interest in the western countries, and more especially in India. Besides the missions of the Buddhist monks, there were a great number of missions composed of generals and magistrates, who all brought back from their travels very useful documents. The Chinese government, which in those days had, it would seem, much more intercourse with India than at present, did not fail to utilize all these documents and place them within reach of the public. Stanislas Julien mentions no less than eight large works of this kind which were published in the course of the seventh century.

With regard to pilgrims and famous men of learning their number was considerable, and the services they rendered were brilliant enough to excite public admiration—even in

the most remote times—and to induce the ancients to preserve their history in special writings. The St. Petersburg library possesses eight Chinese miscellanies, some of which have twenty or two-and-twenty volumes in quarto on the biographies of the most celebrated Buddhists. The first of these biographies was composed from the year 502 to the year 556; and the last is almost of modern times, having been compiled in 1777. The others belong to the seventh, tenth, eleventh, thirteenth, fifteenth, and seventeenth centuries; for China, although often invaded by foreign nations, has known neither the intellectual cataclysm, called in western history the invasion of the barbarians, nor the darkness of the Middle Ages.

Even from the beginning of the eighth century, in 713, that is after six or seven hundred years of almost uninterrupted communication, the multitude of works brought back from India was sufficiently cumbersome to necessitate voluminous catalogues, in which the titles of the books were classed according to their dates, followed by the names of the translators and editors, with more or less detailed notices. One of these catalogues, printed in 1306 under the Yuens, comprised fourteen hundred and forty works, and was itself but the epitome of four others, successively published in 730, 788, 1011, and 1037. It was the collective work of twenty-nine learned men 'versed in the languages', who were associated together for this long work, and of a Samanean especially appointed to verify the accuracy of the Indian words. Besides these catalogues, the Chinese had other collections that contained analyses of Buddhist writings, intended to take the place of this mass of unwieldy books. The *Tchin-i-tien*, which exists in the Public Library in Paris, and whence Stanislas Julien drew the most instructive information, is a compilation of this kind.⁵

⁵ One of the most eminent services Stanislas Julien rendered to Buddhistical learning is having established methodical and unquestion-

With regard to the translation itself of the sacred books, it was the object of the most minute care, and surrounded with every possible guarantee. Colleges of translators, authorized by imperial decrees, were officially appointed. This work of translation necessitated the employment of whole convents; emperors themselves did not disdain to write prefaces for these books, intended for the religious and moral instruction of their subjects. Out of piety and respect for the traditions of their ancestors, the dynasty reigning at the present moment in China has had reprinted, in an oblong folio size, all the ancient Chinese, Tibetan, Manchou and Mongolian translations, and this immense collection fills no less than thirteen hundred and ninety-two volumes.

We will now study Hiouen-Tsang's share in this vast enterprise. When he followed his vocation as missionary, the Buddhist faith had been publicly adopted in his country for about five hundred years (the year 61 or 65 of our era). It had reaped great triumphs, and had sustained dismal eclipses. Hiouen-Tsang strove, like many others, to revive it during one of its periods of decline; but if he was one of its most useful and enlightened apostles, he was not the only one, and it would be showing little appreciation of his worth if a glory that he shares with many of his co-religionists were exclusively attributed to him. This point must not be lost sight of in studying his biography, which is calculated to excite the greatest curiosity; for it may be doubted whether in our western countries, in the midst of the seventh century, it would be possible to find a literary and religious personage more interesting than Hiouen-Tsang, notwithstanding his prejudices and his incredible superstition.

able rules for the restitution of Sanskrit names mutilated by the Chinese transcripts. As there is no alphabet in the Chinese language, and several articulations are lacking, the foreign words of which it tried to represent the sound were often so altered as to be absolutely unrecognizable. To return to them their original form was a most difficult problem, which both Rémusat and Burnouf had, for lack of information, failed to solve.

A native of Tchin-Lieou, in the district of Keou-Chi, Hiouen-Thsang belonged to an honourable family, who had held important posts in his province. His father, Hoeï, had refused, out of discretion and love of study, to follow the career of his ancestor, and had avoided public duties in times of civil disturbances. Having undertaken himself the education of his four sons, he soon noticed the precocious intelligence and earnestness of the youngest, Hiouen-Thsang, and he devoted himself to the culture of these remarkable dispositions. The child repaid him for his care, and at a tender age was confided to the management of his second brother, who had embraced a religious life in one of the monasteries of Lo-Yang, the eastern capital. He displayed the same diligence and prodigious aptitude at the convent as under his paternal roof, and by an exception, which the elevation and steadiness of his character more even than his knowledge justified, he was admitted without examination at the age of thirteen among the monks. The fact is that even at this early period his vocation had revealed itself, and 'his sole desire was to become a monk in order to propagate afar the glorious Law of the Buddha.' The books he studied most particularly, and with which he was thoroughly acquainted, were the sacred book of the Nirvāṇa⁶ and the *Mahāyana Samparigraha Sastra*,⁷ the complete summary of the Great Vehicle.

For seven years the youthful novice went with his brother to all the most renowned schools to finish his education, and in the midst of the sanguinary revolutions that were then agitating the empire, he underwent trials that prepared him for those he had to undergo in his future travels. He remained a few years in the Chou district, which was less disturbed than the others, and he there diligently followed the lectures of the best qualified masters. The two brother's

⁶ *Nie-pan.* ⁷ *Che-ta-ching-lun.*

vied with one another in learning and virtue, and in the Kong-hoei-sse convent of the town of Tching-Tou they were both noticed for 'the brilliancy of their talents, the purity of their morals, and the nobility of their hearts.' At the age of twenty Hiouen-Thsang finished his novitiate and received full monastic orders; this took place in the fifth year of the Wou-te period, that is in 622. During the summer retreat that followed, he studied discipline, the *Vinaya*, and continued investigating the Sūtras and Sāstras. He still had some doubts about different points of doctrine that neither he nor his brother had been able to solve, and in order to decide these, he went from town to town during six years, to consult the professors who were considered the most learned. But even at that time he was himself a consummate master, and in the convents where he sojourned he was often requested to explain some of the most important works. Thus, in the convent of Thien-hoans-sse, at King-Tcheou, he expounded three times during the autumn season the two books of the *Mahayana Samparigraha Sāstra* and the *Abhidharma Sāstra*. Such was the fame of his teaching, that the king, Han-yang, accompanied by his officers and a multitude of monks, came to hear him, and were the admiring spectators of a brilliant victory the Master of the Law gained over those who had come to interrogate and discuss with him. At Tch'-ang'na his success was no less brilliant, and the oldest and most scholarly masters admitted that this young man's knowledge surpassed theirs. Nevertheless, Hiouen-Thsang felt that he still lacked many things, and far from being blinded by the praise that was lavished on him, he resolved to travel in the countries of the west, in order to consult wise men as to certain points of the Law on which his mind was still disturbed. Moreover, he recalled to mind the travels of Fa-Hian and of Tchi-Yun, the first scholars of their day, and 'the glory of seeking the Law which

was to guide men and procure their happiness' seemed to him worthy of imitation.

In concert with several other monks, he presented a petition for leave to travel in India; but having been refused by an imperial decree, he decided to start alone, notwithstanding the difficulties and perils which awaited him. He was still hesitating when the recollection of a dream of his mother's and one of his own settled his mind, together with the predictions of a skilful astrologer who had drawn his horoscope, and whose prophecy came true. Hiouen-Tsang was at this time twenty-six years of age.

He at once repaired to Liang-Tcheou, the general resort of inhabitants of the west bank of the Yellow River and of all the merchants of the neighbouring countries. He was preparing to leave this city, after having delivered there, as elsewhere, several well-attended lectures on the Law, when a first obstacle nearly overthrew all his plans. The governor of the city had received the strictest orders from the imperial administration to prevent anybody leaving the country. But, thanks to the secret assistance of some professors who approved his purpose, Hiouen-Tsang succeeded in escaping from the city, remaining hidden during the day and travelling all night. A little further on, at Koua-Tcheou, he would have been arrested on the denunciation of spies sent in pursuit of him, if the governor, touched by the frankness of the pilgrim, who confessed who he was, and by his magnanimous courage, had not saved him by destroying the official document containing his description.

Two novices who had followed him so far took fright at these first obstacles and abandoned him. Left alone and without a guide, Hiouen-Tsang bethought him that the best way to procure one was to go and prostrate himself at the feet of the Maitreya Bodhisatwa^a statue and offer up fervent

^a *Mi-le's*. Maitreya was the future Buddha, whom Sākya-muni consecrated as his successor when he quitted the Tushita.

prayers. The next day he repeated them with equal faith, when he suddenly saw near him a man from the barbarian countries come in, who declared his wish to become a monk and receive his instructions, and who willingly consented to be his guide.

The flight was not easy. At the extreme frontier, about fifteen miles from the city, it was necessary to pass unperceived through a barrier, 'which was the key to the western frontier.' It was situated near the widest part of an extremely rapid river, and beyond this barrier five signal towers, guarded by vigilant sentinels, had also to be avoided. The barrier was cleverly evaded, thanks to the youthful guide; but he declined to go any further, and he left the Master of the Law to continue his perilous journey alone. The twenty-four long miles that separated the barrier and the towers was a desert of arid sand, where the road was only marked by heaps of bones and the marks of horses' feet. No sooner had Hiouen-Tsang entered it than he was assailed by visions caused by the mirage; he supposed them to be delusions, created by the demons who wished to oppose his undertaking; but he heard in the air a voice that cried to him to sustain his courage: 'Fear not! Fear not!'

Reaching by night the first tower, which he was obliged to approach in order to get water, he ran the risk of being killed by the arrows of the sentinels. Fortunately the commander of the guard-house, who was a zealous Buddhist, consented to let him pass, and moreover gave him letters of recommendation to the chief of another station, to whom he was nearly related. The traveller was obliged to make a long circuit to avoid the last station, where he would have found obdurate and violent men; but he lost his way in the second desert he had to cross. To crown his misfortunes, the goat-skin that contained his supply of water was empty. In utter despair, he was about to retrace his steps and return eastwards. But no sooner had he gone three miles in this

new direction than, seized by remorse, he said to himself, 'Originally I swore if I did not reach India⁹ I would never take one step to return to China. Why have I come here? I prefer to die going west than to return to the east and live.' He therefore resumed his way, and fervently praying to Avalokitesvara,¹⁰ he again directed his steps towards the north-west. Four nights and five days he wandered in the desert without a drop of fresh water to refresh his parched throat. He kept up his drooping courage by reading in the midst of his prayers the *Pradjñā-Parāmita* and Avalokitesvara's Sūtra. However, overcome by thirst, fatigue, and want of sleep, he was about to perish when a breeze that rose in the night revived him, as well as his horse, which was almost equally exhausted. They therefore managed to struggle on, and in a few moments they reached the bank of a pond surrounded by fresh pasture-land, towards which the animal's infallible instinct had led him.

After two more days of painful journeying he at last reached a convent in the country of the Oigurs,¹¹ where he found some Chinese monks.

These first details, which bear an evident impress of truth, notwithstanding some exaggerations on the part of his biographers, give us an insight into the character of Hiouen-Thsang, as well as the terrible obstacles he had to overcome. Besides the knowledge which had already made him famous, he possessed an imperturbable faith, boundless courage, and an energy that nothing could dishearten; he was, in fact, a perfect missionary.

Other trials of a different nature, but no less formidable, still awaited him. No sooner had he rested a few days at the country of the Oigurs than the powerful king of *Kao-Tch'ang*, one of the tributaries of China, sent messengers to invite him to come to his kingdom. This was a command

⁹ *Thien-tchou*. ¹⁰ *Kouan-in*.

¹¹ *I-gou*.

the poor pilgrim could not disobey. The reception which the king *Khio-wantai* gave him was no less cordial than it was magnificent, but when, ten days later, the Master of the Law wished to leave, the king declared his firm intention of keeping him to the end of his life, as teacher of his subjects and chief of the monks appointed to instruct them. In vain did Hiouen-Tsang protest, alleging the sacred purpose of his journey, the king remained inflexible. But the Master of the Law took on his side a no less extreme resolution, and knowing that 'the king, notwithstanding his great power, had no control over his mind and will,' he refused to eat, determining to die of hunger sooner than abandon his design. Three long days had already elapsed, when the king, ashamed and afraid of the consequences of his obduracy, respectfully offered him his apologies and set him at liberty. Feeling but little reassured after so much cruelty, Hiouen-Tsang made the king swear he would keep his word, first by taking to witness the sun, and then the Buddha, before whose statue they worshipped together. The king swore, in the presence of his mother the princess *Tch'ang*, that he would always treat the Master of the Law as a brother, on condition that on his return from India, he would come back to the country of *Kao-Tch'ang*, and spend three years there. Hiouen-Tsang consented to this, and sixteen years after fulfilled his promise. Moreover he consented to remain another month in the *Kao-Tch'ang* country, and he devoted all that time to the religious instruction of the court, which, with the king at its head, came every evening to listen to his pious lessons.

When the month had expired, the Master of the Law departed, loaded with rich presents and accompanied by a numerous escort he had himself chosen; he was provided with a quantity of provisions, besides twenty-four letters of recommendation to the sovereigns of the different countries he had to pass through. In an elegantly expressed letter, which his biographers have carefully given at full length and

which was indeed worth preserving, he thanked the king for his great generosity.

The remainder of the journey, thanks to all these supplies, was somewhat less fatiguing, although interspersed with many hardships. On leaving the kingdom of Kutch, the first in which the pilgrim found Buddhism the established religion, the caravan had to cross a high mountain, *Musuraola*¹² covered with perpetual snows, which took seven days, and where they lost fourteen men and a quantity of oxen and horses. After having skirted the lake of Issikul and gone fifty miles beyond it, Hiouen-Thsang met, in the city of *Sou-che*, the Turkish Khan,¹³ who received him sumptuously in his tents of felt, and who, after a banquet, surrounded by his horde, listened to his pious instructions on the Ten Virtues and the Six Paramitas,¹⁴ dismissed him, loaded with magnificent presents, and gave him an interpreter to conduct him to Kapisa, in India. At Samarkand, Hiouen-Thsang tried to convert the king and the people, who were fire-worshippers, and by appointing monks, he was able to hope that he had re-established Buddhism, which had in former days been brought there, as the presence of two deserted convents attested. At Baktra,¹⁵ he first found Buddhism flourishing, with its monuments, relics, and legends of all sorts. There were no less than a hundred convents and three thousand monks,—all devoted to the study of the Little Vehicle. In a convent called the New Convent, an imposing edifice, richly decorated, situated north-west of the city, they showed the Buddha's water-jug, his broom, and one of his front teeth. On festivals, the three relics were exhibited, and the people and the monks worshipped them. It was said, in the city of *Poli*, situated about thirty miles from Baktra (*Balk*) that the Tathāgata had come to these places, and two stūpas had been raised as memorials of his presence and his benevolence.

¹² *Ling-Chan*. ¹³ *Tou-Kie*.

¹⁴ *Po-lo-mo*. ¹⁵ *Balk*, *Fo-ko-lo*.

In the kingdom of Bamian¹⁶ Hiouen-Tsang found no less ardent faith, with convents, stupas, magnificent statues of the Buddha, and monks belonging to divers schools, devoted to the study of the Law. After having twice crossed the Black Mountains (Hindu Kush) and the kingdoms of Kapisa¹⁷ and Lampā¹⁸ he entered the kingdom of Nagarahāra, where he saw the first monuments of the great monarch Asoka¹⁹ whose dominion seems to have extended to these distant countries. A stūpa three hundred feet high, erected at the gates of the city, was attributed to him.

From this moment the pilgrim found everywhere traces of this potentate, whose empire appears to have comprised the greater part of the peninsula.

We have shown Hiouen-Tsang's courage and the knowledge he had acquired about the most difficult religious subjects; but his character would not be complete if we did not also mention some of his superstitions.

In the kingdom of Nagarahāra, he visited a city which bore the unknown name of City of the Top of Fo's Cranium. The following account gives the reason of this singular name. On the second story of a pavilion, in a small tower 'formed of seven precious things,' a famous relic called Usnisha was enshrined. This bone, enclosed in a casket, was more than a foot in circumference. It was of a yellowish-white colour, and the minute holes where the hair grown were still distinctly visible. Those who wished to know the extent of their sins and their virtues used to pound perfumes, and with the powder make a soft paste which they deposited, well wrapped up in silk, on the sacred bone. The box was then closed, and according to the state of the paste when it was taken out again, each of the consulting parties knew what amount of happiness or misfortune they might expect. Hiouen-Tsang

¹⁶ *Fan-yen-na.*

¹⁷ *Kia-pi-che.*

¹⁸ *Lan-po.* ¹⁹ *Won-yeou.*

received for his share a moulded figures of the Tree of Wisdom (Bodhi-druma), while a young Sramana who accompanied him only obtained the figure of a lotus. The custodian of the sacred bone, seeing this miracle, was delighted; he snapped his fingers and, scattering flowers, he said to Hiouen-Tsang: 'Master, what you have obtained is exceedingly rare, and clearly shows that you already possess a portion of the Bodhi,²⁰ Wisdom of the Buddha.' They also showed the pilgrim, who on his side was most generous, other relics no less saintly, and among others, the eyeball of the Buddha, which was so brilliant, the biographers say, that it was seen to shine through the box. They also showed him the Buddha's raiment (*sanghāti*) and his staff.

It might be supposed that in this first adventure Hiouen-Tsang was the dupe of some cunning trick; but the following is still more complicated and more extraordinary.

He heard that six miles distant from the city of Pradīparasmipura²¹ there was a cave where the Tathāgata, having conquered the king of Dragons who inhabited it, had left his shadow. He resolved to go and render him homage 'not wishing,' he said, 'to have come so near without worshipping him, and well aware that if he lived for a thousand kalpas, it would be difficult to find, even once, the real shadow of the Buddha.' In vain was it represented to him that the roads were dangerous and infested with robbers; in vain was it urged that for the last two or three years hardly any of those rare visitors who were so imprudent as to face the peril had returned; nothing could shake his purpose. After a great deal of difficulty he found, on a farm belonging to a convent, an old man who consented to act as his guide. No sooner had he started, than he was attacked by five ruffians, who rushed upon him sword in hand. Hiouen-Tsang calmly showed his religious habit and disarmed them by firm and kindly words.

²⁰ *Pou-ti*. ²¹ *Teng-Kouang-tch'ing*.

The grotto he was bound for was situated near a river between two mountains, and the entrance was through a kind of door in a stone wall. On looking into it Hiouen-Thsang could discern nothing, but following the instructions of the old man, he found his way in the darkness and reached the spot where the shadow rested. Then, filled with deep faith, he made the hundred salutations prescribed; but still he saw nothing. He bitterly reproached himself for his sins, wept with loud sobs and gave way to his grief, devoutly reciting the *Sri-mālādevi Sinhānāda Sūtra*²² and the Gāthās of the Buddhas, prostrating himself at each strophe. He had scarcely finished the first hundred salutations, than he saw on the eastern wall of the grotto a slight glimmer which immediately vanished; it was as wide as a monk's jug. He recommenced his salutations, and a second light as wide as a bowl appeared and disappeared as rapidly. Filled with enthusiasm, he declared he would not leave the grotto till he had seen the shadow of the *Venerable of the Century*. At last, after two hundred more salutations, the cavern was suddenly flooded with light, and the shadow of the Tathāgata, of dazzling whiteness, stood out upon the wall, 'like when the clouds part, and suddenly reveal the marvellous image of the Golden Mountain.' A dazzling brilliancy lighted up the outline of his noble countenance, and his raiment was of a yellow-red colour. From his knees upwards, the beauty of his person shone in the full light. To the left, and to the right, and behind the Buddha, could be seen all the shadows of the Bōdhisatwas and venerable Sramanas who form his retinue. Hiouen-Thsang, in an ecstasy of delight, gazed intently on the sublime and peerless object of his admiration. When he had sufficiently contemplated this miracle, he commanded from afar six men who waited outside, to bring fire and burn perfumes. As soon as the fire blazed, the shadow of the Buddha disappeared; and directly the fire went out,

²² *Ching-man-king.*

the image reappeared again. Five of the men saw it; but one of them did not see anything whatever. Hiouen-Tsang respectfully prostrated himself, proclaimed the praises of the Buddha, and scattered flowers and perfumes. The divine apparition having ceased, he took his leave and departed.

To all appearance, the pilgrim was once more deceived by some charlatan's trick; perhaps, however, he was his own dupe, and the old man who accompanied him gave him the true explanation: 'Master,' he said, 'without the sincerity of your faith, and the energy of your prayers, you would not have obtained such a miracle.' The history of superstitions is full of such hallucinations; and over-excited imaginations, like that of Hiouen-Tsang, are too ready to receive them, if circumstances permit. The countries the pilgrim travelled through have at all times been given up to the wildest dreams, and when he sees the traces of the Buddha's footsteps, on a large stone on the north bank of the Subhastu that he crosses, he does not hesitate to say ingenuously: 'that these traces appear long or short, according to the degree of virtue possessed by those who look at them, and according to the energy of their prayers.'

It will at once be understood that being so easily satisfied with what he sees himself, he is still more so with what is related to him; for he is as credulous with regard to traditions as he is about his own supernatural visions. Near to the mountain *Hsi-lo*, he visited the spot where the Tathāgata,²⁸ filled with gratitude towards the Yakshas, gave them his own body as alms; the place, not far from *Moung-Kie-li* (probably Manghelli or Manikiala), marked by a stūpa, where the Tathagata pierced his body with a knife; the spot near Takshasila where, as chief of a great kingdom, he made an offering of a thousand heads; in the same way as near Purushapura (actually Peshāwar) he saw the spot, marked by one of Asoka's stūpas, where during a thousand succes-

²⁸ *Jou-lai*.

sive existences the Tathagata gave his eyes as alms; and not far distant from the river (the Indus²⁴) the spot where Siddhārtha, while only prince royal, gave his body to appease the hunger of seven tiger-cubs. Henceforth Hiouen-Thsang will for the remainder of his journey live in the midst of this world of marvels and delusions; and he mentions hundreds of such miracles with the most imperturbable composure.

After various journeyings in Udyāna, and the valley of upper Sindh and the Panjāb, he entered by the north-west into the kingdom of Kashmir (Kasmīra).²⁵ In its capital he found no less than a hundred convents, inhabited by five thousand monks. There also he saw four enormous stūpas, that had been built in former days by the king Asoka²⁶ each of these stūpas containing *sariras*²⁷, that is personal relics of the Tathāgata.

As the report of Hiouen-Thsang's fame had preceded him in Kashmir, the king, to do him honour, sent one of his uncles to meet him, as far as the Stone Gate, on the western frontier of the country, and himself went to receive him at some distance from the capital. This respectful greeting was but the prelude to more substantial favours. The king, not satisfied with admitting at his table the foreign monk who came from Great China (Mahā Tchīna),²⁸ gave him twenty scribes to copy for him all the Sūtras and Sāstras he wished to have, and he moreover appointed five persons as his personal attendants, instructing them to furnish him, at the expense of the treasury, with all he might require. For centuries past, learning had been held in great honour in this kingdom, and the knowledge of the Law had been carried so far that in the four hundredth year after the Tathāgata's Nirvāṇa the king Kanishka²⁹ held a council of five hundred learned monks, under the presidency of Vasubandhu, which drew up three Commentaries on the Pitakas. In the convent

²⁴ *Sin-tou.*
²⁵ *Ché lis.*
²⁶ *Kia-chi-mi-lo.*
²⁷ *Mo-ho-ichi-na.*
²⁸ *Wou-yeou.*
²⁹ *Kia-mi-ssé-kia.*

where the pilgrim resided, he followed the learned lessons of a professor of the Law, who explained to him all the difficult points of the principal Sāstras; and the lectures, at which the Chinese monk displayed the most lively and acute intelligence, became so interesting, that learned men came from all parts of the kingdom to hear them. The success and favour shown to a stranger soon excited the jealousy of the monks of Kashmir, but owing to the superiority of Houen Tsiang's intelligence, and his kindness of heart, he was able to overcome all enmity, and he spent two whole years in this kingdom in order to make a thorough study of the sacred books.

Wherever he found teachers capable of improving his knowledge he would stop to hear them and submissively follow their instructions. Thus in the kingdom of Chinapāti, he spent fourteen months under Vinītaprabha; in that of Lalandhara he passed four months under Chandravarma; in the kingdom of Srughna, he spent one winter and spring under Jayagupta; and in Matipura, half the spring and the whole summer under Mitrasena, all renowned professors, thoroughly acquainted with the Three Commentaries.

After having crossed the Ganges several times, in the course of his various wanderings, he reached the kingdom of Kanyākubja, governed at that time by a generous and devout prince called Śilāditya, with whom he was destined to become more intimately connected.

On going down the Ganges from Ayodhyā to the kingdom of Nayanukha, the pilgrim, who might have supposed himself secure from any further danger, nearly perished in a strange manner, and was saved only by a miracle. The boat that conveyed him and eighty other persons was surprised by a band of pirates. These robbers worshipped the goddess Durgā⁸⁰ and every autumn they offered up in sacrifice to this divinity, 'to obtain good fortune,' the finest and hand-

⁸⁰ Tā k'ā.

somest man they could lay hands on. The Master of the Law was chosen as the victim, but not in the least dismayed he thus spoke to the ruffians: 'If this contemptible body were worthy of your sacrifice, I would certainly not grudge it to you. But as I have come from distant lands to honour the image of the Bodhi and the Vulture's Peak, to procure sacred writings, and to be instructed in the Law, my vow is not yet accomplished; and I fear, most generous men, that in taking my life you will call down upon yourselves the greatest calamities.' It could hardly be expected that robbers would be influenced by such pious arguments, and the chief pirate having ordered his men to prepare the altar, which was to be made of earth kneaded with water from the river, two of the robbers, drawing their swords, dragged off the poor monk to sacrifice him on the spot. Hiouen-Tsang betrayed no fear or emotion, but only asked for a few moments' respite, to prepare to enter Nirvāna with the necessary joy and tranquillity of soul.

'Then,' his biographers add, 'the Master of the Law thought tenderly of Maitreya³¹ and turned all his thoughts to the palace of the Tushitas, offering up ardent prayer that he might be reborn there, so that he could pay his respects and do homage to that Bodhisatwa, and receive the *Yogācharā Bhūmi Sāstra*³² and hear the explanation of the *Good Law (Saddharma)*, and attain enlightened Intelligence, and then be reborn on earth to instruct and convert these men, to make them practise acts of superior virtue, and abandon their infamous profession, and finally to spread abroad the benefits of the Law, and give peace and happiness to all beings. Then he worshipped the Buddhas of the ten countries of the world, and seating himself in the attitude of meditation, energetically fixed his thoughts on Maitreya Bodhisatwa without allowing any other idea to distract him. Suddenly, it seemed to his enraptured mind that he was rising up to Mount Sumeru,

³¹ *T's'e-chi*.

³² *Yu-kia-sse-ti-lum*.

and that after having passed through one, two, and three heavens, he saw the Venerable Maitreya in the palace of the Tushitas, seated on a bright throne, surrounded by a multitude of Devas. At this moment his body and soul were bathed in joy, unconscious that he was near the altar, unmindful of the pirates thirsting for his blood. But his companions burst out in tears and lamentations, when suddenly a hurricane arose on all sides, breaking down trees, scattering clouds of sand, raising great waves upon the river and sinking all the boats.'

The pirates, terror-struck and deprived of all means of retreat, exhorted one another to repentance, and threw themselves down at the knees of Hiuén-Thsang, who told them that those who give themselves up to murder, pillage, and impious sacrifices, suffer eternally in the future world.

'How dare you,' he said to them, 'for the satisfaction of this contemptible body, which vanishes in an instant, like a flash of lightning or the morning dew, bring upon yourselves tortures which will last throughout an infinite number of centuries?'

The robbers, touched by his courage, threw their weapons into the river, restored to each traveller his stolen goods, and respectfully listened to the Five Commandments.³³

When he had reached the banks of the Ganges and the Jumna, the pilgrim remained for several years in the places made famous by the presence and preaching of the Buddha, and he piously visited Srāvastī³⁴ the former residence of the king Prasenajit³⁵ and the famous Anātha Pindika; Kapilavastu, the city where the Buddha was born, amongst the ruins of which still lingered so many memories of his childhood and youth; Kusi-nagara, where the Buddha, resting under the shade of four sālas, entered for ever into Nirvāna; Benāres (Varānaśī)³⁶ where he had 'for the first time turned

³³ The Five Commandments are those prescribed by the Tathāgata: Not to kill, not to steal, &c.

³⁴ *Chi-lo-fa-si-ti.*

³⁵ *Po-lo-sse-na*

³⁶ *Po-lo-ni-sse.*

the Wheel of the Law' in favour of his five disciples; Vaisa¹⁸⁷ where he had studied under Arāta Kālāma before appearing in the world, &c.

In Magadha¹⁸⁸ Hiouen-Thsang had still to visit places yet more sacred, if it were possible. After having spent seven days in visiting the monuments of Pātaliputra, and before going on to Rājagriha, he travelled thirty miles further south to worship the Bodhidruma, *the Tree of Wisdom*, still carefully tended, the Vajrāsanam, *the Diamond Throne*, seat of the Buddhas, contemporary it is said of heaven and earth, and a number of other monuments almost as venerable. It can be imagined with what ardour the devout pilgrim paid his homage. On beholding *the Tree of Wisdom* and the statue of the Tathāgata, which the Bodhisatwa Maitreya had erected near it, he contemplated them with an ardent faith, and prostrating himself before them, he gave vent to his grief in lamentations.

'Alas,' he said with a sigh, 'I know not what was the condition of my miserable existence at the time the Buddha attained perfect wisdom: and now that I have reached this spot, I can only meditate with shame on the immensity and depth of my sins.'

At these words, a flood of tears bathed his face, and all those who saw the Master of the Law in this afflicted condition, could not refrain from shedding tears likewise.

These places were full of monuments of all kinds: vihāras, sanghāramas, pillars, and especially stūpas, most of them attributed to the great king Asoka, who, according to tradition, had caused eighty-four thousand to be built all over India. Most of these were in ruins when Hiouen-Thsang visited them, as they had been already two hundred years before in the days of Fa-Hian; and this dilapidation made them doubtless still more venerable in the eyes of the courageous pilgrims who had come so far to worship them.

¹⁸⁷ Fei-che-li.

¹⁸⁸ Mo-hia-lo.

Hiouen-Thsang resided no less than five whole years in Magadha, not to speak of the second journey he took there, after having travelled over all the southern and western parts of the peninsula. But this first sojourn, which he spent entirely in the great monastery of Nālanda, inhabited at that time by ten thousand monks, is so full of interest that some details must be given about it. It is interesting to know something of the domestic life of one of these vast communities which, in the seventh century of our era, were so numerous in India. The sanghārama of Nālanda, the largest of all, affords this opportunity; and the descriptions of this immense establishment, protected by kings and venerated by the faithful, will give us a very fair idea of the labours and customs of the Buddhist monks. It was in this sanctuary of knowledge and virtue that Hiouen-Thsang learnt the Sanskrit language, and acquired the higher knowledge which was to make his fortune among princes, and his fame among his fellow-countrymen.

The immense convent of Nālanda was situated in one of the most holy parts of Magadha, about thirty miles from the Bodhimanda, the renowned and sacred retreat, where after six years of continual austerities Sākya-muni had at last attained perfect Buddhahood. Tradition relates that the spot on which the convent was eventually built, was originally a wood of mango-trees, which rich merchants converted by the Tathāgata had offered to him. He had resided there some time, and in memory of his inexhaustible charity towards orphans and the poor, the place had been called Nālanda.³⁹ The piety of the kings of that country had not failed to strengthen popular belief by embellishing Nālanda with magnificent edifices. They had successively built six convents, at first separated from each other; but the last

³⁹ Nālanda, composed of three words, *Na alam da*, means in Sanskrit: *He who is never weary of giving*. The etymology of the word has certainly greatly assisted the legend.

king had enclosed all these buildings by a single wall. He had divided the extensive space between the six convents into eight courts, and the monks' habitations were no less than four stories high. Towers, pavilions, and domes rose on all sides, and running streams and shady groves kept all cool and fresh.

In this splendid abode ten thousand monks and novices resided, maintained at the expense of the king and the neighbouring cities. Devoted to study, they were generally followers of the doctrine of the Great Vehicle. The votaries of eighteen schools gathered together there, and all the sciences were cultivated, from the vernacular writings and the Vedas, down to medicine and arithmetic. Moreover, there were halls assigned to lectures, where a hundred different professors discoursed every day to the students, who had nothing to disturb them from their pious tasks, and who, thanks to the generosity with which they were treated, could, without appealing to extraneous assistance, obtain from the convent the Four necessary things (that is to say, raiment, food, lodging and medicines). In fact their progress in knowledge was assured, and Nālanda was not only the finest vihāra in India, but it was the most learned and the most famous for the zeal of its pupils and the talents of its masters. It reckoned about a thousand monks who could explain twenty works on the Sūtras and Sāstras; five hundred who knew thirty, and only ten who understood but fifty. The Master of the Law, Hiouen-Tsang, was in the last class, already deemed eminent. But the Superior of the convent, Śīlabhadra, had read and fathomed all the Sūtras and Sāstras without exception; and the high rank he occupied was due to his eminent virtue, his learning, and his venerable age.

Such was the holy sanctuary to which the Chinese pilgrim had been solemnly invited. Four monks, chosen from among the most distinguished, had come to Bodhimanda to bring

him the invitation. He had accepted it, and when he went to Nālanda, two hundred monks, followed by a crowd of the faithful, came to meet him with parasols, banners, perfumes, and flowers; they walked round him singing his praises, and then led him to the convent. There, they made him sit on an armchair placed on the same platform as the president, and the sub-director (*Karmadāna*) striking a gong (*ghaṇṭā*), in a loud voice invited the Master of the Law to stay in the vihāra, and to make use of all the implements and goods belonging to the monks. He was then presented to the Superior by twenty men of mature age and dignified appearance, well versed in the knowledge of the Sūtras and Sāstras. When Hiouen-Tsang stood before Śīlabhadra, he did him homage as a disciple. In conformance with the rules of respect established among them, he advanced on his knees, and leaning on his elbows, beat his feet together, and struck the ground with his forehead. Śīlabhadra received this homage with kindness, and had seats brought for the Master of the Law and the monks who accompanied him; then after having questioned and highly praised him, he made his nephew, a very capable speaker, relate the history of a long illness from which he had suffered, and which had been miraculously cured, three years before, by a dream, in which three divine personages had come and announced to him the future arrival of Hiouen-Tsang.

'Since my journey is in accordance with your former dream' replied the pilgrim, much affected, 'be kind enough to instruct and enlighten me, and complete my happiness, by allowing me to pay you the respect of an obedient and devoted disciple.'

On leaving the Superior, Hiouen-Tsang was established with his retinue, consisting of ten persons, in one of the best houses of the convent; every day, the necessary provisions were sent to him by the king, and two monks, one a Sramana

and the other a Brahman, who served him, took him out in a chariot, or on an elephant, or in a palanquin.

When Hiouen-Thsang was settled at Nālanda, he only went out to visit the sacred places of the neighbourhood: Kusagarapura, the ancient capital of Magadha; the Vulture's Peak; the Bamboo grove at Kalanta; the places where the first orthodox Council, under the presidency of Kāśyapa, and the dissident Council of the General Order had been held; Rājagrihapura; the stūpas and vihāras in the vicinity, &c. While he remained in the convent he diligently followed Śīlabhadra's instructions, making him explain several times the books he did not yet know, re-examining those he had formerly read, in order to dispel any doubts he might still retain; even perusing the books of the Brahmins, which were indispensable for his acquiring a perfect knowledge of Sanskrit grammar, among others the work of Pāṇini, a summary of all the previous works on the same subject.

The Master of the Law thus spent the five years of his residence at Nālanda, absorbed in these serious studies. At the end of that time he knew the language, and had so thoroughly sifted all the books of the Three Commentaries and those of the Brahmins that he no longer required the instructions of Śīlabhadra and his monks. He therefore gratefully took leave of his hosts, and continued the course of his pilgrimage. At this period, he had scarcely accomplished half his mission, as he had taken three years to get from China to Magadha, where he had resided five years. He had still to travel through the whole of the eastern side of the peninsula, the centre, the western part, and to return again to Magadha before retracing his steps homewards. He subsequently devoted eight years to these long peregrinations.

We will only mention the principal incidents of his journey.

On leaving Magadha, he travelled through the kingdoms of Hiranyaparvata, Champā, Kadjūgira, Kainasuvarna, Samatata and Tāmralipti. There for the first time he heard of the Island of Ceylon (Sinhala),⁴⁰ where Buddhism was said to be perhaps even more flourishing than in India itself. He intended going there by sea, although the passage was no less than seven hundred yodjanas, when a southern monk advised him to avoid the dangers of such a long voyage by going down to the point of land at the extremity of the peninsula, whence, after a three days' voyage, he would reach the kingdom of the Lion (Sinhala): Hiouen-Thsang resolved to follow this prudent advice. He was not, however, destined to visit Ceylon: for when he reached the port of Kānchīpura, at the southern extremity of India, and was on the point of embarking, he heard that the island was a prey to civil war and famine. He therefore merely collected all the information he could obtain on the ancient history of Sinhala, on the introduction of Buddhism, which it was said had been imported there a hundred years after the Nirvāṇa of the Buddha by Mahinda, brother of king Asoka,⁴¹ and on the chief monuments of the island, etc. But he did not cross the straits, and in company with seventy monks of Sinhala he continued exploring the continent. Leaving the kingdom of Dravida he went on to that of Kongkanapura, where the cap Siddhārtha had worn when prince royal was piously preserved. In Mahārattha (the country of the Mahrattas) he found the most martial and best disciplined population of these countries. The king was of the Kshatriya race; and when a general was defeated, he was punished by having a woman's dress sent to him. The Buddha's law was held in as high honour in this kingdom as in any of the others, and Hiouen-Thsang saw a number of monuments that tradition attributed to the great king Asoka.

⁴⁰ *Seng-kia-lo.*

⁴¹ See Rhys Davids' *Buddhism*, p. 229, 'Mahinda was Asoka's own son.' (Translator's note.)

Going up to the north-west he reached the kingdom of Malwah, which vied with Magadha itself for the gentleness and politeness of its inhabitants, the culture of letters, the esteem in which virtue was held, and the harmony of its language. Thence, passing through many extensive kingdoms, sometimes following the coast line, sometimes plunging across country, he reached the frontiers of Persia; but he did not penetrate any further, although he might, from what he had heard, have found there several Buddhist monuments. He therefore turned eastwards, and after many a long march he got back to the banks of the Indus that he had formerly crossed on his arrival from China, but this time he was much nearer its source. On the eastern bank of the river he passed through Sultan, where the idolatrous inhabitants worshipped the Sun-god; and from the kingdom of Parvata he turned to Magadha, whence he had started on this fatiguing journey.

On his return to Nālanda he found fresh studies awaiting him, but this time he met with full compensation in the shape of divers brilliant successes. The aged Silabhadra still ruled over the convent, and Hiouen-Thsang was henceforth capable under this guidance of communicating to others the deep learning he had acquired. Silabhadra, who appreciated his worth, appointed him several times to expound the most difficult books to the multitude of monks; and Hiouen-Thsang acquitted himself of this duty to the general satisfaction of the community. He was, moreover, capable of writing Sanskrit, and he wrote several books, which excited the admiration of the whole Order, and in which he refuted the errors of the Sāṅkhya and the Vaiśeṣika systems, while striving to reconcile the different doctrines which at that time divided Buddhism. These studies pointed him out as a fit person for an important mission, which he fulfilled with great credit to himself.

Magadha was at that time ruled by King Śilāditya, whose dominions, it appears, extended over a considerable part of India. Full of piety and veneration for the convent of Nālanda, he had built near it a magnificent vihāra, which excited the jealousy of the neighbouring states. The king, returning from a military expedition, was passing through the kingdom of Orissa, when the monks of the countries that followed the doctrine of the Little Vehicle came to complain to him of the advantages he had given their adversaries (the convent of Nālanda followed the doctrine of the Great Vehicle) by bestowing such a benefit upon them. In order to further their cause, they presented him with a book in which their principles, they said, were explained, and they defied the partisans of the Great Vehicle to refute a single word.

‘I have heard’, replied the king, who belonged to the latter school, ‘that a fox, finding himself one day in the midst of a troop of rats and mice, boasted that he was stronger than a lion. But no sooner did he see a lion than his heart failed him, and he disappeared in the twinkling of an eye. You have not yet, venerable masters, seen the eminent monks of the Great Vehicle; that is the reason why you so obstinately assert your foolish tenets. I greatly fear that when you perceive them you will resemble the fox I have just spoken of.’

‘If you doubt our superiority,’ they replied to the king, ‘why not assemble the adherents of the two doctrines, and bring them face to face to decide on which side lies truth or error?’

The king gave his consent to this religious combat, and wrote at once to Śilabhadra to send to the kingdom of Orissa four of the most eloquent of his monks, in order that they might solemnly confute the heretics. Śilabhadra, who knew Hiouen-Thsang’s abilities, and did not share the

jealousy he had excited around him, appointed him as the fourth champion.

The four vindicators of the Great Vehicle and of the honour of Nālanda were getting ready to start, and only awaiting a fresh order from the king, when an unexpected circumstance gave a still greater authority to Hiouen-Thsang, and dispelled all the doubts that certain persons had of his capabilities.

A heretic of the Lokāyata sect came to Nālanda to argue on the most difficult questions with which the professors were at that time occupied. He wrote a summary of his system in forty articles, and hung up this document on the convent gates.

'If any one', he said, 'can refute a single article, he may cut off my head to proclaim his victory'.

This was, it appears, the ordinary and somewhat dangerous formula employed for this sort of challenge. Some days elapsed before any one answered this insolent provocation, and the Lokāyata had already flattered himself that he had at least won a tacit triumph, when the Master of the Law sent from the interior of the convent 'a man without sin', a monk, with the order to take down this writing. Then Hiouen-Thsang tore it to pieces and trampled it under foot. When the Brahman heard whom he had to deal with, he declined to contend with the Master of the Law; but Hiouen-Thsang compelled him to appear before Śīlabhadra and the chief monks, and in their presence he refuted the opinions of all the heretical schools—Bhūtas, Nirgranthas, Kāpālikas, Sankhyikas, Vaiseshikas, etc.—with such force and irony that the Brahman remained speechless, without power to utter a word. At last he arose and said:

'I am conquered; you are free to avail yourself of my first condition.'

'We, the children of Sākya', replied the Master of the

Law, 'never injure men. To-day I will do nothing more than take you into my service as the obedient slave of my will.'

The Brahman, delighted at getting off so easily, respectfully followed him, and enthusiastically praised all he had just heard. Hiouen-Thang kept him some time with him, and then set him free, without uttering a word which could wound the pride that had been so painfully humiliated.

However, all was being prepared for the great contest at which Śilāditya was to preside in person. Hiouen-Thsang had prepared himself for his part by contesting point by point in a work called '*A Treatise in Refutation of Erroneous Doctrines*', the book which had been presented to the king by the adherents of the Little Vehicle.

The appointed place of meeting was Śilāditya's capital, Kanyākubja, situated at the confluence of the Ganges and the Kalini. The Master of the Law accompanied thither the king, who overwhelmed him with attentions. It was the last month of the year. Shortly after, eighteen kings of central India (all tributaries of Śilāditya) arrived, at the same time as three thousand monks, learned in both the Great and Little Vehicles, two thousand Brahmans and heretics, and about a thousand monks from the convent of Nālanda. Two enormous thatched buildings had been constructed at the place of convocation to receive the statue of the Buddha and contain this multitude of people. On the appointed day the sacred ceremonies began at dawn. First was carried round with great pomp a golden statue of the Buddha, which had been expressly cast for the occasion; it was carried under a splendid canopy placed on a great elephant. Śilāditya, holding a white fly-fan and dressed as Indra, walked on the right; on the left walked a tributary king, Kumāra, another of Hiouen-Thsang's admirers, dressed to represent Brahma. Two elephants, loaded with choice flowers that were scattered at each step, followed the Buddha. The Master of the Law and officers of the palace, riding

large elephants, had been invited to take their places behind the king; and lastly the tributary kings, the ministers, and most celebrated monks advanced on both sides of the road, singing praises—they were borne on three hundred elephants. The procession had about two miles to go after leaving the king's travelling tent. At the door of the enclosure every one alighted, and the statue was placed on a costly throne in the palace designed for it. *Silāditya*, together with *Hiouen-Thsang*, first did homage, and then the assembly was brought in. It must have been composed, besides the eighteen kings, of a thousand of the most illustrious and learned monks, of five hundred Brahmans and heretics, and finally of two hundred of the ministers and chief officers of state. The remainder of the crowd, who could not enter, were obliged to place themselves silently outside the enclosure. After a magnificent repast, served indiscriminately to everybody, and after rich presents had been distributed to *Hiouen-Thsang* and the monks, the king requested the Master of the Law to preside at the conference, to make a eulogy of the Great Vehicle, and to state the subject of the discussion.

Hiouen-Thsang first ordered a monk of the convent of *Nālanda* to make known his prolegomena to the multitude, and he had a copy written out that was hung at the door of the enclosure, in order that they might be examined by all the spectators. He added at the end, as the Brahman he vanquished had done:

'If any one finds a single erroneous word in this, and is capable of refuting it, I will let him cut off my head to show him my gratitude.'

Although this solemn challenge excited them, not one of the adversaries dared to address the meeting to contest the arguments of the Master of the Law. The next and following days the pomps and ceremonies of the previous day were repeated. *Hiouen-Thsang* vindicated and deve-

loped the theses he had laid down, which were again received in silence by the heretics. The fifth day, seeing that he had confuted the principles of the Little Vehicle, they conceived a deadly hatred for him, and, unable to attack him by fair means, they made a plot to assassinate him. Silāditya, discovering this, undertook his defence, and threatened the malcontents with severe punishment. Thenceforth the partisans of error slunk away and disappeared, and the contest announced with so much pomp did not take place. Eighteen days were spent in waiting, but no one dared to utter a word of discussion. The evening of the day the Assembly was to disperse, the Master of the Law once more recommended the doctrine of the Great Vehicle, and extolled the virtues of the Buddha with so much enthusiasm, that a multitude renounced the narrow views of the Little Vehicle and embraced the sublime principles of the Great Vehicle.

Hiouen-Tsang had gained the victory; Silāditya and the other kings wished to reward him by enormous gifts of gold and silver. He refused to receive them, and, modest as he was disinterested, he only accepted the triumph awarded to the victor in conformance with ancient custom. Mounted on an elephant richly caparisoned, and escorted by the highest dignitaries, he rode through the multitude, while the king himself, holding up his vestment, proclaimed with a loud voice:

‘The Chinese Master of the Law has brilliantly established the doctrine of the Great Vehicle, and has reduced to nought all the errors of the sectaries. In eighteen days no one has been found who dare discuss with him. This great triumph shall be known to all men.’

The people in their joy bestowed on him the title of God of the Great Vehicle (*Mahāyāna-Deva*), the partisans of the Little Vehicle, humiliated by his greatness, gave him out of respect the name of the God of Deliverance (*Moksha-Deva*). In memory of this victory Silāditya had the golden

statute of the Buddha placed in the convent of Nālanda, with a great quantity of vestments and precious coins, which he confided to the care of the monks. At the zenith of favour, glory, and learning, Hiouen-Tsang had now nothing further to do than to leave India and return to China, with all the sacred spoils he had collected in his long researches. He therefore took leave of the monks of Nālanda, and taking with him the books and statutes he had gathered together, he closed the series of his lectures. Before his departure he was obliged, at the urgent request of Sīlāditya, to accompany him to the kingdom of Prayāga⁴² to be present at the great distribution of alms which the king made every five years, in the vast plains situated at the confluence of the Ganges and the Jumna. Here, as the biographers of Hiouen-Tsang tell us, were gathered together no less than five hundred thousand persons, who received the royal alms. We shall give later a description of this solemn festivity.

At last Sīlāditya allowed Hiouen-Tsang to set out on his return journey to China. One of the kings of Northern India undertook to have his books and statues conveyed as far as the Indus. After having revisited Takshasila, the pilgrim crossed the river, where, by a vexatious accident, he lost about fifty manuscripts and a quantity of curious seeds he was taking back to plant in China. He was able, however, to have the works he had lost recopied in the kingdom of Udyāna; and the collection of sacred writings, which was the real object of his travels, was neither diminished nor injured. Hiouen-Tsang did not return through Kashmir; he went by the kingdom of Kapisa, and crossed for the second time the snow-clad mountains (Hindu Kush), braving the same dangers he had so happily escaped from fifteen years before. This time he again extricated himself from all perils, but his caravan had gradually diminished, and was now reduced to seven monks, twenty servants, one

⁴² *Po-lo-yé-Kia.*

elephant, ten asses, and four horses. At the foot of the mountains he reached the kingdoms of Antarava (Anderab) and Kustana, which in former days had formed part of the kingdom of Tukhara. Thence he continued his march to the north-west, crossed the Oxus, and then, directing his steps to the east, he advanced in a straight line to the Chinese frontier, passing through the kingdoms of Munkan, Sighnak, the valley of the Pamirs⁴³ across the Tsong-hing mountains, the kingdom of Khasgar and that of Tchakuka. In Kustana⁴⁴ he found a population whose honest and gentle behaviour strongly contrasted with that of the neighbouring tribes. They were full of respect for the Law of the Buddha, which, it was said, had been brought there at an early date from Kashmir by the arhān Vairochana. The inhabitants of Kustana held learning in high esteem, and delighted in music; the characters they used in writing were very similar to those of India, although the language was a different one; they were also most industrious, and the stuffs they made were exported far and wide. Hiouen-Tsang remained several months in this country, awaiting an answer to a letter he had written to the king of *Kao-Tchang*, who at the outset of his travels had tried to detain him against his will, and who had only given way on extracting from him the promise of a visit on his return journey.

After having passed through the former kingdom of Tukhara⁴⁵ and made several circuits, he at last reached the Chinese frontier, and saw once more his native land.

No sooner had he arrived at Cha-Tcheou than he hastened to forward a letter to the emperor, who resided at Lo-Yang, fearing he might have excited his anger by proceeding on his journey without his permission. But the emperor, who had kept himself informed of Hiouen-Tsang's

⁴³ *Po-mi-lo*.

⁴⁴ Actually Khotan.

⁴⁵ *Tou-ho-lo*.

success, displayed great friendliness, and sent an order to Si-'an-fo, chief of the kingdom of Liang and governor of the western capital, to receive him with the honours due to his piety and merit.

The pilgrim's journey was ended, but the missionary's work still remained. He still had to bring to the knowledge of his countrymen the sacred books he had brought back from India, and this task, to all appearance much easier, was nevertheless extremely laborious. Hiouen-Thsang, in a journey that he himself estimated at fifteen thousand miles, and which had lasted seventeen years, had collected the most abundant and valuable materials. He had now to work them up, and he devoted the remainder of his strength and life to this labour.

When the commander of Liang heard that Hiouen-Thsang was approaching Tchang-'an, he despatched the general commanding the cavalry and the chief official of the district to greet him. The two functionaries were ordered to go forward to meet and conduct him from the great canal to the capital, and to instal him in the mansion assigned to ambassadors. At the same time the city magistrates invited the monks of all the convents to prepare hangings, sedan-chairs, flowers, banners, &c., for the procession of the morrow, when the sacred books and the statutes were to be officially placed in the Convent of the Great Happiness.⁴⁶ The next day they all assembled in groups, marshalled in due order, and the convent treasury received all that the Master of the Law had brought back from the western countries.

The following is its curious enumeration:

First, one hundred and fifty particles of *sariras*⁴⁷ or relics proceeding from the Tathāgata body.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ *Hong-fo-sse.*

⁴⁷ *Che-li*

⁴⁸ *Jou-lai's.*

Secondly, a golden statue of the Buddha, whose shadow had remained in the Dragon's Grotto, on the Prāgbuddhagiri mountain, in the kingdom of Magadha, with a pedestal of a transparent substance three feet three inches high, similar to the statue of the Buddha that is seen in the kingdom of Varānasi (Benāres), which represents him turning for the first time the Wheel of the Law in the Deer Park (Mrigadāwa).

Thirdly, a sandal-wood statue of the Buddha three feet five inches high, exactly like the one the king of Kosāmbi, Udāyana, had caused to be modelled from life.

Fourthly, a sandal-wood statue two feet nine inches high, similar to the one in the kingdom of Kapitha, representing the Tathāgata at the moment when he descends from the palace of the Devas.

Fifthly, a silver statue four feet high, similar to the one representing the Buddha explaining *The Lotus of the Good Law*, and other sacred books, on the Vulture's Peak.

Sixthly, a golden statue of the Buddha three feet five inches in height, similar to his shadow that he left in the kingdom of Nagarahāra, and which represents him overcoming a venomous dragon.

Seventhly, a carved statue in sandal-wood one foot three inches high, similar to the one in the kingdom of Vaisālī, which represents the Buddha going round the city to convert mankind.

After the statutes came the books, deemed even more precious. They were divided into ten classes, of which the first included the sacred books (Sūtras) of the Great Vehicle, and numbered 124; and the other classes, the sacred books and special treatises of several schools, both of the Little and Great Vehicle, of the Sarvāstivādas, the Samnitiyas, the Mahīsāsakas, the Kasyapiyas, the Dharmaguptas, &c. This collection, which consisted of no less than 657 works divided into 525 parts, was carried by twenty-two horses.

Having fulfilled this first duty, Hiouen-Thsang went in all haste to rejoin the emperor in the palace of the Phoenix at Lo-Yang. The sovereign received him with much consideration and kindness; he questioned him at length about the climate, produce, and customs of the different countries in India, and the sacred monuments he had worshipped there. He urged him to write the history of his travels; and, delighted at all the virtues he discovered in him, he offered him an important office under government. But Hiouen-Thsang was wise enough to refuse this brilliant offer. He only knew the Law of the Buddha, and understood nothing about the doctrine of Confucius, 'which is the soul of the administration.' The emperor wanted to take him with his retinue on a military expedition to punish some rebels in the east. But the monk again refused, urging that his principles, founded on the love of mankind, did not permit of his being present at battles and scenes of bloodshed, and the sole favour he craved was to be assisted in translating into the *Fan* language the six hundred books which he had brought back from the western countries, and of which not one word was yet known in the Chinese language. The emperor indicated the Convent of the Great Happiness at Tchang-an, and Hiouen-Thsang hastened thither to complete his pious mission.

Twelve monks were allotted to him, well versed in the explanations of the holy books and the treatises of the Great and Little Vehicle, to revise the translations, correct the style, and write out fair copies under his dictation; these monks had been carefully chosen from amongst the most talented in the principle convents of the neighbourhood. Nine others of high merit were especially employed to revise and polish the translated texts, and among them was Hoei-li, the author of the first drawing up of Hiouen-Thsang's biography. Then two Samaneans, men learned in the study of the characters and revision of Indian texts,

were added to this learned society, not to mention a number of subordinate copyists.

With this assistance Hiouen-Thsang was able in less than three months to offer the emperor, with the abridged narrative of his travels which he had been asked for, the translation of five books. In presenting these works, Hiouen-Thsang begged the emperor 'to deign to take up his august brush and write, in praise of the Buddha, a preface, in which his sublime thoughts would shine like the sun and moon, and the writing, precious as silver and jade, would last as long as heaven and earth, and become for future generations an object of inexhaustible admiration.' The emperor, after making some objections, consented to write this preface, which contained seven hundred and eighty-one characters. The biographers carefully reproduce the whole of it, as well as the correspondence that took place on the subject between the sovereign and Hiouen-Thsang. Soon after the prince royal followed his father's example, and wrote, like him, an introduction to the newly-translated sacred texts. At the request of the superior of the Convent of the Great Happiness, the emperor allowed the two prefaces to be engraved on metal and stone slabs, which were deposited in the convent.

The favour Hiouen-Thsang enjoyed soon brought forth most important results. Following his advice, the emperor decreed that in every convent of the different districts five monks should be ordained, and fifty in the Convent of the Great Happiness. As at that time there were three thousand seven hundred and sixteen convents scattered all over the empire, over eighteen thousand and six hundred monks or nuns were ordained. It seems that before this epoch, and under the last years of the Soui dynasty (581-618), most of the convents and temples had been plundered, and almost all the monks exterminated. This immense increase to their numbers re-established them in a flourishing condition. Thus Hiouen-Thsang might flatter himself that he had

not only revived Buddhist faith by his travels, but that he had restored it to its ancient splendour. Moreover, the reigning sovereign, Thien-wou-ching-hoang-ti, was himself a very fervent adept; he frequently argued on the sacred texts with the Master of the Law, whom he admitted into his intimacy, and whom he more than once disturbed in his pious labours in order to have him near him. This emperor died in 650; but his son who succeeded him was equally the friend of the Master of the Law.

Moreover, Hiouen-Thsang gained this extraordinary favour by shunning it as much as lay in his power. Living secluded in the Convent of the Great Benevolence that the prince royal had built, near the palace at Lo-Yang, to honour the memory of his mother, 'his sole occupation was translating the sacred books without wasting a moment.' Every morning he set himself a fresh task, and if any business had prevented his finishing this task in the daytime, he never failed to continue his work during the night. If he met with any difficulty, he would lay down his brush and book; then, after having worshipped the Buddha and continued his religious exercises till the third watch, he would snatch a little rest, and at the fifth watch he would rise, read out loud the Indian text, and note down in red ink the passages he had to translate at daybreak. Every day for four hours he explained a fresh Sūtra or Sāstra to the monks of his convent, or to those of the different provinces who thronged to him in order to consult him as to the meaning of some doubtful or difficult passage. The disciples who came to take his instructions about the interior management of the convent, with which he was entrusted, filled the galleries and halls adjoining his cell. To all he replied clearly, omitting nothing. He expounded aloud and spoke with animation, without appearing to feel fatigue, such was the strength of his body and the vigour of his mind. 'Often did princes and ministers come to pay him their respects. When they

had heard his counsels, all opened their hearts to the faith; and, abjuring their natural pride, they never left him without giving him sincere proofs of admiration and respect.'

The Master of the Law was still to spend fourteen years at this laborious work. In 659 he obtained the emperor Kao-Tsong's permission to withdraw with his assistant translators and disciples to the palace of Yu-hoa-Kong, where he hoped to lead a more secluded life. There he undertook the difficult and lengthy translation of the *Pradjñā-Pāramitā*, the Indian manuscript of which contained no less than two hundred thousand slokas.⁴⁰ The book of the *Pradjñā-Pāramitā*, or Perfection of Wisdom, which the Chinese called *Pan-jo*, was the Sūtra at that time held in greatest repute. It had in former centuries been translated, but it was far from complete, and from all sides the Master of the Law was strongly urged to undertake a new translation. The Sūtra of the *Pradjñā-Pāramitā*, it was said, had been expounded four times by the Buddha himself in sixteen solemn conferences—on the Vulture's Peak, in Anātha Pindika's garden, in the palace of the king of the Devas, and in the Convent of the Bamboos at Rājagriha. As the text was very lengthy, all Hiouen-Tsang's disciples begged him to abridge it, and, following the example of preceding translators, he might have curtailed the tedious passages and suppressed repetitions. But he had a terrible dream that deterred him from this sacrilegious project, and he resolved to translate the whole work conformably with the Indian text, as it was taken down from the very lips of the Tathāgata. He had obtained three copies in India, but when he began his translation he found many passages of doubtful authenticity. By dint of care and zeal he was able to re-establish

⁴⁰ We do not possess this long transcription, but only three others: of 100,000, 25,000, and 8,000 slokas, the shorter ones being abridgements of the longer. See Burnouf, *Introduction à l'histoire du Bouddhisme Indien*, p. 662, &c., and the *Journal des Savants*, January, 1855, p. 44.

the text in all its genuineness. 'When he had fathomed a deep thought, thrown light on an obscure point, or re-established a vitiated passage, it was as if a god had brought him the solution he sought for. Then his spirit was gladdened like that of a man plunged in darkness, who sees the sun break through the clouds and shine forth in all its splendour. But ever mistrustful of his own wisdom, he attributed the merits to the mysterious inspiration of the Buddhas and the Bodhisatwas.

Nevertheless these varied and lengthy labours had exhausted Hiouen-Thsang's strength, and he hurried on as much as possible the translation of the *Pradjñā-Pāramitā*, lest death should overtake him. When he had finished it he said to his disciples:

'I came, you know, to the palace of Yu-hoa-Kong by reason of the book of the *Pradjñā-Pāramitā*; now that this work is finished, I feel that my life is coming to an end. When, after my death, you carry me to my last abode, let it be done in a simple and humble manner. You will wrap my body in a mat, and lay it down in the midst of a valley, in a peaceful and lonely spot. Avoid the vicinity of a palace or convent, for a body as impure as mine must be placed far from such buildings.'

His disciples tearfully promised to obey him, and tried to encourage him by the hope that his death was not so near at hand. But the Master of the Law was not mistaken in his presentiments. After the *Pradjñā* he tried to translate another compilation almost as voluminous, the *Ratanakūta Sūtra*, which the monks of his convent were most desirous of knowing. He made a great effort to comply with their wishes; but he had scarcely translated a few lines when he was obliged to close the Indian book, his strength proving unequal to his courage. He went out, therefore, with his disciples to offer up his last homage to the statues of the Buddhas, in the *Lou-tchi* valley, in the vicinity of the convent.

From that day he ceased translating and gave himself up to religious exercises.

A short time after this, as he was crossing the bridge of a canal situated at the back of his house, he fell and grazed his leg. In consequence of this accident he was unable to rise from his bed. Feeling his forces failing and the supreme moment drawing near, he commanded one of his monks to write down the titles of the sacred books and treatises he had translated, numbering all together seven hundred and forty works and thirteen hundred and thirty-five volumes. He noted down also the ten millions (a koti) of paintings of the Buddha and the thousand images of Maitreya Bodhisatwa that he had caused to be made. Besides, he had had an immense number of untinted statuettes cast, and a thousand copies written of various sacred books. He had provided food and shown compassion to over twenty thousand believers and heretics. He had lighted a hundred thousand lamps and ransomed several tens of thousands of beings. When the monk had finished writing down the list of his good works, Hiouen-Thsang ordered him to read it aloud; then he said to those present, who overwhelmed him with praises:

'The moment of my death is approaching; I feel already as though my mind were giving way and leaving me. You must immediately distribute my garments and riches to the poor, have statues made, and desire the monks to recite prayers.'

In order to comply with his wishes, a feast was spread for the poor and alms were distributed. The same day the Master of the Law directed that a moulder should cast a statute of Wisdom (Bodhi) for the palace of *Kia-cheou-tien*, and after that he invited the whole of the convent, his fellow-workers, and disciples, 'to come and joyfully bid farewell to the impure body of Hiouen-Thsang, who, having accomplished his work, deserved to live no longer. I wish,' he added, 'that any merit I have acquired by my good works

may revert to other men, that I may be born with them in the heaven of the Tushitas, be admitted into the Maitreya⁵⁰ family, and serve that Buddha full of tenderness and love. When I shall return on earth to pass through other existences, I desire, with each new birth, to fulfill with boundless zeal my duties towards the Buddha, and at last attain *superlative and perfectly enlightened Wisdom (Anuttara samyak sambodhi)*.' Then he repeated, with his dying breath, two Gāthās in honour of Maitreya, which he made the persons around him repeat after him. He then raised his right hand to his chin, and placed the left on his breast, stretched out his legs, crossed them, and turned on his right side. He remained motionless in this position till the fifth day of the second moon. In the middle of the night, his disciples inquired of him:

'Master, have you at last obtained leave to be born in the midst of Maitreya's Assembly?'

'Yes,' he replied in a failing voice, and a few moments later his soul had passed away. This took place on the fifth day of the second moon in the year 664.

The Emperor, distressed at such a loss, commanded a general mourning, and resolved to give the Master of the Law a magnificent funeral. But his disciples, faithful to his last wishes, had brought back his body on coarse mats into the capital, and had deposited it to await its burial, in the Convent of the Great Benevolence, in the centre of the hall appropriated to the translation of the books. It was in these coarse wrappings that the body of Hiouen-Tsang was brought to the funereal ceremony, which was celebrated with the greatest pomp. The Master of the Law's grave was chosen, according to his wishes, in a plain north of the *Fan-ichouen* valley, where a tower was built in his honour.

It would be unjust to Hiouen-Tsang's memory if, before taking leave of him, we did not record all the feelings

⁵⁰ *Mi-le's*.

of reverence and esteem which his memory ought to inspire. However, much as we may differ from this poor pilgrim, he is not less worthy of our consideration and remembrance.

What first strikes us in Hiouen-Thsang's character, and wins all our sympathy, is the ardour and sincerity of his faith. It might doubtless have been more enlightened and more rational, but it could never have been more living, more thoughtful, and more persevering. Superstition obscures the mind, but it does not corrupt the heart, and it may be allied to the most sterling virtues. According to the sphere in which a man is born, the education he receives, the habits and customs he conforms to, he may have the most ignorant, indeed absurd, beliefs, without his soul being any the less pure. He may worship the most insensate idols, and accept the most extravagant traditions, without losing any of his moral worth. A hero may be as credulous as the lowest of men; in truth it is impossible to be more credulous than the good Chinese pilgrim, but this can be overlooked; and in the seventh century of our era, we need not look far to find in Christian customs, still imbued with the habits of barbarians, equally foolish beliefs and tradition. We must not be too severe on others, when our own history contains such recollections and dark memories.

But with this single exception, we can find nothing but what is admirable in the life of Hiouen-Thsang, from whichever side it is viewed.

The singleness of purpose that directs it is never departed from, and during fifty consecutive years one invincible idea inspires and guides it. At the age of thirteen, perhaps even earlier, his vocation revealed itself, and up to the moment of his death, that is to say, till he was sixty-eight year old, his whole exertions were devoted to following, strengthening, enlarging, and fulfilling it. His only desire, from childhood, had been to propagate afar the glorious Law bequeathed by the Buddha; and during more than half a

century his life was spent in serving this Law, without permitting any obstacle to dismay or discourage him. First and as an introduction to this rough career, he went through the arduous studies that disciplined his youth, and led him, in spite of civil wars, into the various provinces of the Empire; then, when his harvest of knowledge was gathered, and when at the age of thirty he felt capable of putting into execution the resolve he had patiently trained himself for, he undertook this formidable journey, which kept him sixteen years far from his own country, and exposed him to endless perils of all kinds, unknown barbarous countries, deserts where his only guides were the bones of the travellers who had vainly striven to cross them before him, inaccessible mountains where for whole weeks he had to march through perpetual snow, over precipices, across impetuous rivers; then, besides the dangers of nature, dangers still more certain created by men, attacks of covetous and pitiless robbers, a thousand pitfalls laid for a stranger, amid races of whose language he was yet ignorant; and, above all, the allurements of riches and power, so often exercised on the pilgrim, and always victoriously repelled. Nothing could make him lose sight, even for a day, of the object of his pursuit; and at the beginning and end of his journey we see him resisting the offers of the kings of Kao-Tch'ang and of Kānyakubja, as he had resisted the pirates of the Ganges, the hospitable monks of Nālanda, and later still the yet more seductive proposals of the Chinese Emperor. He gathered information, travelled, and translated in order to propagate the Law of the Buddha; this was his whole life, simple and grand, humble and painstaking, disinterested as well as energetic.

In no other civilization, at no other period, even among the nations enlightened by the purer light of Christianity, can a more thorough example of zeal, courage, and self-abnegation be met with. It would be easy to find greater

intellect, but difficult indeed to find a more magnanimous spirit.

One trait is particularly striking in the inner life of this soul, such as his disciples and biographers describe it, and this is the total absence of that veiled egotism, of which the Buddhist faith may with good reason be accused. Hiouen-Thsang is not occupied with the thought of his own personal salvation; and he only dimly intimates once or twice, that he counts on the eternal reward of his labours. He never thinks of self; he thinks of the Buddha, whom he worships with all the strength of his mind and heart; above all he thinks of other men, whom he strives to enlighten and save; his life is a perpetual though apparently unconscious sacrifice; and in this absolute self-renunciation he does not seem aware that his actions are as sublime as they are ingenuous. He never reflects on his own conduct. To disdain riches, honours, power, and all the enjoyments of life, is already a very rare merit; but not to think even about the eternal salvation which he firmly believed in, while doing all that was needful to be worthy of it, is a merit still more rare and refined; and there are very few, even amongst the most pious, who have carried self-denial to this extreme limit, where nothing remains but the unalloyed idea of right. Hiouen-Thsang was one of these choice beings, and it is only right and just to recognize it. The singular ideal he made for himself may provoke a smile, but the irreproachable conduct this ideal inspired ought to be revered. It is not only in his external actions that he ought to be admired, but also in the motives that dictated those actions, and impart to them their true value.

Studied from this point of view, Hiouen-Thsang's character is one of the most curious of problems. We are too ready to believe that the virtues we possess under our temperate climates, and which, thanks to our civilization, are the growth of three thousand years, are an exclusive right

that belongs only to us; we too easily believe that other times, other races, and especially other religions have no share in them. We shall not be suspected of any partiality for Buddhism, for we have severely criticized the vices and errors that disgrace it. But it must be admitted that in the presence of such examples, we feel more indulgent towards it, and while detesting its dogmas, we cannot deny that its influence has sometimes been excellent, if not on races, at least on individuals. In the seventh century of our era, about twelve hundred years after the Buddha, amid a people for whom we have little esteem, we find one of these noble personages, one of these beautiful lives that may be held up as an example to humanity. Without holding anything in common with the strange belief that inspires it we might earnestly desire that the majority of men who live under a better faith, should have his purity of heart, straightforwardness, generosity, and elevation of sentiments which never relax under the most perilous trials.

We have hitherto only studied the personality of Hiouen-Tsang and the principal incidents of his life. We have now to see all he can tell us about the countries he travelled through, the history of those remote times, and the condition of Buddhism in India in the seventh century of the Christian era. Of course, his testimony, sincere as it is, must be received with the greatest caution; the good pilgrim was exceedingly credulous, and it is extremely probable that he more than once played the part of a dupe. However, we may be certain of one thing, he never seeks to deceive, and when he speaks of what he has himself seen, he must be attentively listened to, only we must, if reason demands it, somewhat modify the narrative. In general, however, we may trust and be grateful to him for the valuable information he hands down to us. At the moment he visited India, before the Mussulman conquest, it was still exclusively Brahmanist and Buddhist. It is a very obscure period of

its history, and Hiouen-Tsang is almost the only eye-witness who has given us any information about it.

We will now see what he has to say on that subject.

CHAPTER II

It is not for the purpose of verifying the exact geographical position of the places Hiouen-Thsang describes, that we purpose to follow him in his long and perilous pilgrimages. This would be too special and lengthy a task for us to undertake, and we must leave it to those better fitted and more familiar with such studies.⁵¹

We shall now limit ourselves to the composition of the *Si-yu-ki*.

In the large catalogue in the library belonging to the Emperor Kien-Long, the authentic and complete title of Hiouen-Thsang's work reads as follows: 'Memoirs on the Western Countries published under the great Thangs, translated from the Sanskrit, by Imperial decree, by Hiouen-Thsang, Master of the Law of the Three Commentaries, and edited by Pien-kik, a monk of the convent of Ta-tsong-tchi.' We are to understand by translated from the Sanskrit, not a translation in the ordinary acceptation of the word, but a co-ordination of the Sanskrit works which Hiouen-Thsang made use of to compose his own book.

The most important point would be to know the real nature of the Sanskrit works that Hiouen-Thsang consulted, and of which he has transmitted the substance. But it is rather difficult to form any exact idea of these works, and it is worth much even to know of their existence. The Sanskrit literature, as far as it is known to us, shows us nothing like them, and judging from the frequent quotations that Hiouen-Thsang makes from the Sanskrit *Memoirs* he made use of and had under his eyes—for he often translates them word for word—it seems certain that these *Memoirs* bore little

⁵¹ See the excellent *Mémoire* of Vivien de Saint-Martin, following Hiouen-Thsang's *Memoirs*, vol. ii. 254, &c., and *Nouvelles Annales des Voyages*, 5^e Série, 1853.

resemblance to the *Mahāvansa* written in *Pāli*, which Turnour has given us, nor to the *Rājatarangini*, which we owe to Troyer. We must therefore conclude, that in the seventh century after Christ, at the time when the Chinese pilgrim travelled over India, there were to be found in Sanskrit literature works which described more or less faithfully the history, statistics, and geography of the country; none of which have come down to us. This is doubtless a very unexpected and curious discovery, but it is no less a fact. As Hiouen-Thsang found writings of this kind all over India, from the northern kingdom of Kutch down to Magadha, where he remained many years, in order thoroughly to study them, it is evident that these works were very numerous and well known. The names Hiouen-Thsang gives them are various; sometimes he calls them *Ancient Descriptions*, sometimes *Historical Memoirs*, sometimes *Collections of Annals* and *Royal Edicts*; at other times *Secular Histories*, or simply *Indian Books* on such or such a country, or *Memoirs of India*, &c. Hiouen-Thsang did not confine himself to these indications, already very exact; he does not even confine himself to the quotations he gives from the Sanskrit books; he also tells us the source of these valuable books and their official origin. In a general description of India, which fills the best part of the second book of the *Si-yu-ki*, and which may be considered an excellent introduction to all that follows, Hiouen-Thsang is careful to tell us, in a chapter devoted to literature, that 'special functionaries were generally appointed in India to take down in writing any remarkable speech; and that others had the mission of writing down an account of any events that took place.' Then he adds: 'The collection of annals and royal edicts is called *Nilafita*. Good and evil are both recorded, as well as calamities or happy omens.'

It is therefore certain that India possessed in the days of Hiouen-Thsang, and even long before his time, a large number of historical works, full of details, analogous in a certain measure to those which, since the famous days of Greece, have continued to be drawn up by all the nations of civilized Europe. It must be admitted, while recognizing the value of these annals, that judging even from Hiouen-Thsang's quotations, the natives of India had a peculiar method of understanding and writing history. India has never had a Herodotus, a Thucydides, a Polybius, a Titus-Livy, a Tacitus, or a Machiavelli. It had, however, its original historians, whoever they may have been; and this fact can no longer be denied. It would therefore seem that it is a hasty assertion to say that Indian genius had no knowledge of history; and that in its constant preoccupation about the absolute and infinite, it had never thought of noting the lapse of time, nor of recording in any lasting manner the events that were taking place. India felt this need like the rest of humanity, and tried to satisfy it in the best way it could; and Hiouen-Thsang's testimony, although it stands almost alone, is perfectly undeniable on this subject. His proofs are too constantly repeated, and he relies on too many different authorities, for his credibility to be doubted for an instant.

After trying to make allowance for the parts Hiouen-Thsang borrowed from Sanskrit historians, it is necessary to see, in order to know his personal historical value, what he added of himself. But first and foremost, great forbearance for his superstition must be exercised; for it is allied, in his person, to the most noble qualities; and had he not possessed an enthusiasm that blinded him and made him accept the most foolish legends and believe the most absurd miracles, he would never have undertaken and accomplished his difficult and most useful journey.

The following opinion of the editor of the catalogue of the Emperor Kien-Long's library ought to be our guide: 'The *Sî-yu-ki*', he says, 'constantly quotes supernatural facts and miracles that do not deserve any serious attention; but all that relates to mountains, rivers, and distances to travel may be strictly relied on. For this reason,' adds the librarian very sensibly, 'we have placed the book in our catalogue, and we retain it there in the hope that it may be of use to complete the comparative studies of learned men'⁵². We have no reason to be more severe than a Chinese writer of the eighteenth century, and as Hiouen-Thsang's countrymen find excuses for his credulity, we can also be lenient on the subject. The strange stories of the Buddhist pilgrim may be put aside, without affecting the very exact and varied information he gives when he speaks as an ordinary traveller⁵³.

The following was Hiouen-Thsang's usual method, and the strict and dry manner in which he carries it out, shows that he followed, and to a certain degree copied, the works of his predecessors.

The narrative is carefully divided according to the different kingdoms; moreover it only concerns India and the north-western frontier countries.

⁵² Stanislas Julien, *Mémoires sur les Contrées Occidentales*, by Hiouen-Thsang, preface, p. xxvii.

⁵³ It must be admitted that the singular assertions of Hiouen-Thsang are justified by the unquestionable evidence of travellers of our day. Thus in mentioning the Buddha's statues, Hiouen-Thsang states them to be of such enormous dimensions, that they would indeed seem imaginary. In many cases he does not exaggerate, for in a recent account given by Robert Fortune, this traveller mentions statues of the Buddha that are 165 feet long. The statues Fortune actually saw represented him lying down, like the one mentioned by the Buddhist pilgrim. However strange this kind of statue may be, Hiouen-Thsang's veracity on this point cannot be called in question. See *Revue Britannique*, June, 1857, p. 328.

Hiouen-Tsang begins by giving the length and breadth of each of the kingdoms he visited; and, whenever he is able, he makes special mention of the dimensions and circumference of the capitals.

The pilgrim seems to have obtained the information—which he carefully transmits—not so much from his own personal investigations, as from local traditions and Sanskrit works, to which he had access.

After giving the general dimensions of the kingdom and the capital, and mentioning the frontier countries, the author proceeds to describe the soil and its principal products, as well as the climate and its characteristic qualities. He neither forgets the fruits that are cultivated, nor the different kinds of minerals which the land contains. This more or less concise description of the country is followed by an account of the inhabitants; their habits are described, their garments are depicted, their customs are noted down, and he never omits mentioning the style of writing they made use of⁸⁴, or the money that was current in their commercial transactions. Then from the inhabitants, he passes on to the governments; and even pronounces an opinion on the merit of the kings they obey, who do not always possess the talents requisite for the high position they occupy. He carefully notes down the countries that possess and those that do not possess a code of laws; as well as those in which the law is all-powerful, and those where it is powerless.

⁸⁴ Thus Hiouen-Tsang, in remarking that the inhabitants of the *Sou-li* country in the kingdom of *Bāluka*, in the north-west of India, have few *Historical Records*, adds that they read from top to bottom of the page, and that the alphabet of these people is composed of thirty-two letters (*Mémoires sur les Contrées Occidentales*, p. 13). Further on (*ibid.* p. 24), it is said that the inhabitants of the kingdom of *Kosanna* have an alphabet of twenty-five letters, which are combined together to express everything—a system that was quite new to a *Chinaman*—and that their books, written across, are read from right to left, &c., &c. It is certain that these two alphabets of twenty-five and thirty-two letters, and this writing which is read from top to bottom or from right to left, do not belong to India.

After all these preliminary details, which are never omitted, he comes to the religious part of the narrative. First, the precise number of convents are mentioned, as well as the number of monks who frequent and live in them. The sect to which these monks belong is carefully recorded; for instance, if they belong to the school of the Great Vehicle or the Little Vehicle. Their customs and habits are even more minutely described than those of the inhabitants; and he also states the sources from which the monks have drawn the sacred instructions and the discipline which direct them. He mentions with admiration their austere charity and their meritorious exercises; if their conduct is disorderly, he does not hesitate to point out and blame their errors; and he even goes so far as to note the kind of food they live on, for this is an important point in Buddhist discipline, which only recognizes three kinds of food as pure, and strictly forbids all other.

After the convents and monks, he notices the works which have formed the different sects; he recalls the more or less famous titles of these works, and sometimes analyzes in a few words the doctrine they contain, approving or contesting it. With regard to these literary observations, Hiouen-Tsang's *Memoirs* are naturally less abundant than the biography edited by his two disciples; but the two works complete each other, and together contain plenty of information of this nature, no less instructive than the rest.

But the part of his narrative in which the traveller has given most details, is that concerning the Buddha, the recollections of his personal presence—more or less authentic—the monuments of all kinds raised in his honour or for his worship, the relics treasured up of his blessed body, the legends collected or invented about him by the more or less intelligent piety of his followers, the marvellous traditions about his principal disciples, about the most important events, the most illustrious princes, the most authorized

learned men, &c., &c. This is the weak side of the excellent pilgrim's work. In order to have a thorough knowledge of Hiouen-Thsang's *Memoirs*, and a specimen of his style, we will deal more particularly with his general description of India.

Hiouen-Thsang, after having described thirty-four kingdoms in his first *Memoirs*, from the kingdom of Agni or Akni, to that of Kapisa, reaches at last the kingdom of Lampa now Laghman. With the kingdom of Lampa—that is, beyond the Black Mountains or the Hindu Kush—Ladia, properly speaking, begins. The pilgrim has now, after many accidents, entered the country he has come such a distance to visit: the land of the Holy Faith. It would seem as though the Master of the Law pauses before beginning the detailed narrative of his exploration, in order to take a general view of his subject, which he approaches with the greatest respect. Hence in the *Memoirs* his interesting notice on India, full of curious details which certainly make it the most valuable part of his work. It gives a very exact picture of India in the seventh century as it presented itself to the observation of pious travellers, and a very precise description of its general features.

Hiouen-Thsang first studies the name of the country, and discovers, after having discussed the various and confused forms given to its name, that the true one is that given by the natives themselves—Indu⁶⁶. Twelve hundred years before Hiouen-Thsang, the country was called by this name, and Herodotus, the first historian who mentions it, always refers to it under this denomination. As the word Indu in Sanskrit also signifies the *moon*, Hiouen-Thsang endeavours to find out by the local traditions what analogy could exist between India and the moon.

After an explanation, half philological and half historical, which we must take for what it is worth, Hiouen-Thsang

⁶⁶ *Intu*.

next turns his attention to the approximative dimensions of India, or as he calls it the Five Indias. He makes out the whole circumference to be ninety thousand *li*. Now, as a *li* is about a quarter of a mile, by this account the total circumference would be about twenty-two thousand miles. This estimate deserves attention, coming from a man who for years had travelled over the greater part of India, and who on this point was in a position to obtain reliable information. However, from recent investigations, it is certain that Hiouen-Tsang's figures are exaggerated. But it would be important to know what he precisely meant by the 'Five Indias' and what countries he included in this vast circle. Even at the present day, the boundaries are somewhat uncertain, for India this side of the Ganges and India beyond the Ganges are terms still in use. Moreover Hiouen-Tsang is well acquainted with the geographical configuration of India. 'On three sides,' he says, 'India is bounded by a great sea; on the north it is protected by snowy mountains (Himalayas). It is broad at the north and narrow in the south; its shape is like that of a half-moon.' It would have been more correct had he said; 'the shape of a triangle.' All these indications, vague as they necessarily are, are nevertheless exact in the main, and the Chinese traveller speaks like a man who, having under his eyes a somewhat faithful geographical map, wishes to give a general idea of what it represents.

Hiouen-Tsang asserts positively that India was, in his day, divided into seventy kingdoms. It is difficult to know if this number is really exact, although the traveller visited and describes the greater part of the Indian kingdoms.

It seems, however, certain that in the seventh century of our era India must have been divided into a number of small dominions, more or less independent of one another. These territorial divisions necessarily varied a great deal according to the rapacity of the petty sovereigns. However,

at the death of the conqueror, all the local sovereignties re-appeared with the dissolution of the transient empire which had for a brief space absorbed them. The country then returned to a political partition, which would seem to have been as natural to it as it was to Greece.

At the present time, and notwithstanding the uniformity of a common submission to the English rule, the peninsula is hardly less divided. Races, languages, religions, sects, and customs are still very varied; small states remain still very numerous and very different one from another, even under the power they are all equally bound to obey. It would not be difficult to make out, in the vast possessions of the English Crown, and in the native states it has thought fit to preserve, the elements of the seventy states Hiouen-Thsang speaks of, which probably existed long before as well as long after his time.

In order to make what he has said of the size of India better understood, the author tries to give the names of the principal measures used in the country, and as a logical consequence he goes on to the divisions of time, the names of the seasons and months, which he carefully compares with the analogous divisions current in China.

After these general remarks, Hiouen-Thsang explains the constructions of the cities and villages, the public buildings, convents and private houses. Then he mentions the interior arrangements of the houses, the beds, seats, ornaments, &c. He attaches great importance to the clothing of the different classes in India; and after having mentioned in a cursory manner the garments worn by the heretics or Brahmans, he dwells with a certain complacency on all the details of those worn by the Sramanas, or Buddhists. He insists on the extreme cleanliness of the natives, and this trait of their national character which strikes him, is in reality so marked that no observer could fail to notice it. At the present time the Hindus are in this respect just as particular

as Hiouen-Thsang and Alexander's companions found them; and in the last mutiny the motive or rather pretext of the mutineers was a personal defilement imposed on them, they said, by discipline, and which they refused to submit to.

These purely material details are followed by a description of the morals and literature of India; and the Chinese pilgrim, himself a learned man, gives to this part of his narrative all the importance it deserves. One remarkable fact is that, notwithstanding his Buddhistical fervour, he does thorough justice to the intelligence and labours of the Brahmans, and he begins by first mentioning them. He describes the admirable writing they make use of, taught them by the god Brahma⁵⁰ himself; the qualities of their harmonious language; the principal books they study, at the head of which he mentions the Vedas; the length of their studies, which they carry on till the age of thirty; the honours and fame which surround the learned and the sages, &c. If the Master of the Law mentions with such esteem the Brahmans, whom he considers as heretics, he is still less sparing in his eulogies of his brethren, the Buddhists. He recalls the eighteen sects which divide Buddhism and by their continual discussions keep up its vitality; the severe discipline the monks bind themselves down to; the sacred books of the Buddha, which are distributed in twelve different collections; the proportional honours bestowed on those whose knowledge of these books is more or less profound, and above all on those who eloquently defend the Law during the solemn discussions, as well as the shame attending the learned men who are vanquished in the controversy; and finally the excommunication that pitilessly falls on those whom neither remonstrance nor reproof have brought back to the right path.

Hiouen-Thsang devotes but a few lines to the difference of castes, and only describes the four principal ones, as it

⁵⁰ *Fan.*

would take too long, he adds, to notice all the others. He briefly analyzes the marriage laws of the Indians, and particularly mentions the horror they have of a second marriage for women; their laws expressly forbidding a woman to have a second husband.

It is well known that this law, which is sanctioned by relentless custom, continues to the present day; and that recently an English newspaper in India gave as an unprecedented fact, and as a great victory of civilization over inveterate prejudice, the case of a young Hindu woman who had just married a second time. This immense progress was obtained by the English authorities after ceaseless efforts, and it may well be considered as great as the abolition of suttecism.

Hiouen-Tsang then turns his attention to the royal families, which belong for the most part to the Kshatriya class; to the soldiers, who are divided into the four different forces of the army—infantry, cavalry, chariots, and elephants; to the generals commanding them; and the weapons which they have made use of from time immemorial, &c. After the war department, the author passes on to the administration of justice; he mentions the principal penalties, and describes with many details the judicial ordeals, which were practised in India long before they were renewed by our Middle Ages. The poor Buddhist pilgrim seems filled with admiration at this simple and infallible manner 'of closing the way to all crime.'

After some details on the nine ways of showing respect, from simple politeness of speech to the prostration of the whole body, Hiouen-Tsang treats of the funeral rites, and the different ways of paying respect to the dead. He does not forget the strange custom of suicide by immersion in the Ganges; and he considers that nine out of every ten old men end their days in this manner, by which superstition eternal life is said to be assured.

Finally, Hiouen-Thsang devotes the last three chapters of his book to some general but disconnected considerations on public administration, on agriculture, and on the precious metals of all kinds that India possesses in abundance. From the above analysis of his notice on India, the process of the Chinese author, and its merits, will be clearly seen. In reality, his way of understanding and presenting things is exactly the same as ours; and a traveller of the present day who would explore India in order to describe all its different aspects would not adopt a different line of conduct. Many doubtless might lack the clear and sure method of Hiouen-Thsang; and few would show so just and upright a spirit. It is true that the investigations of the Chinese pilgrim do not go very deep, but everything is noted, and all is classed in proper order. This in itself is a great deal, and although modern science may find much to criticize, the peculiar talent of exposition possessed by Chinese authors is a very curious phenomenon in the seventh century of our era. At this epoch no one in Europe would have been capable of writing such books, and it is well to call attention again to this singular quality of Chinese writers, which has hitherto generally been ignored.

Leaving aside Hiouen-Thsang's itinerary from his arrival in the north-west of India till his entry in Magadha, we will pause at this latter country, which may be called the Judea of Buddhism.

The devout pilgrim has thought it necessary to devote two whole books of the *Si-yu-ki*, that is, one-sixth of his work, to the description of this Holy Land. There is no need to complain of this, for the details he gives are so precise and comprehensive that they may prove extremely useful for any future exploration of the localities he has so well described. The following are the principal points of Hiouen-Thsang's itinerary in Magadha, and he can be followed step by step

on a special map that has been drawn up by Mr. Vivien de Saint-Martin.

On leaving Nepaul and the kingdom of Vaisāli, Hiouen-Thsang crossed the Ganges at Pātuliputra,⁵⁷ the Palibothra of the Greeks, actually Patna, and directed his steps to the south. He went across the Nairanjanā, and visited the ruins of the convents of Tilasākya, Gunamati and Silabhadra, &c. He then returned for the second time to the Nairanjanā, and crossing it in a south-westerly direction, reached the city of Gāyā, inhabited, at the moment of his visit, almost exclusively by Brahmans. It was in the neighbourhood of Gāyā and the mountains near it that two of the most venerated monuments of the Buddhist religion are to be found: the tree under which the young Siddhārtha attained, after six years of terrible austerities, the state of perfect Buddha (Bodhidruma) and the Diamond Throne, the Platform of Wisdom (Vajrāsanam, Bodhimanda) so called, from the hillock on which the Tathāgata sat when he entered into the ecstasy called the Diamond Ecstasy (Vajrasamādhi). These places are so full of monuments that the pious traveller, after mentioning several of them, relinquishes the task in despair. Wherever the Buddha had passed, stūpas had been raised to perpetuate his great and precious memory.

From Gāyā he resumed his road towards the north-east, again crossing the Nairanjanā, and reaching the mountain called Kukkutapada, or Gurupada. He then went round to the eastern side of the high mountain, from which the

⁵⁷ Hiouen-Thsang heard, and quotes at length, a popular legend which explains the origin of the name Pātali. *Pātali* in Sanskrit is the name of a sweet-scented flowering tree (*Bignonia suaveolens*, Wilson's Dictionary). The legend relates that under a tree of this species, a young Brahman was married and lived for a long time. The tree was afterwards miraculously changed into a sumptuous building that the king inhabited with all his court. As the city had been built by the spirits in favour of the son born to the Brahman under this tree, the place was called 'The city of the son of the *Pātali*.' Pātali-putra acquired fresh importance when the great Asoka made it his capital instead of Rājagriha.

Buddha gazed for the last time on Magadha, before going on to Kusi-nagara to die. He crossed another mountain called Buddhavana, and the great forest of Yashtivana, near which are two springs of mineral waters, and reached the city of Kusāgāgapura, situated in the midst of high mountains in the very centre of Magadha. Continuing in a north-easterly direction he visited the city of Rājgriha, famous by the first Council held there under the great Kāśyapa, after the death of the Buddha.

About ten miles further north he reached the celebrated convent of Nālanda, where he eventually sojourned for five years. Leaving Nālanda, the pilgrim continued to travel northwards in the direction of the Ganges, and quitting Magadha, he arrived at the kingdom of Hiranyaparvata.

Such is briefly Hiouen-Tsang's itinerary in Magadha, and it is certain that, aided by his *Biography* and *Memoirs*, any intelligent traveller, attracted to these places by a legitimate curiosity, would find all the landmarks noted by the Chinese pilgrim, and the ruins of most of the monuments he mentions as having seen himself.⁵⁸

As might be expected, the *Memoirs* do not give the minute details contained in the *Biography* concerning the magnificent retreat of Nālanda, the most frequented Buddhist seminary of the peninsula; for the latter was edited by the talented and loving disciples of the Master of the Law. In mentioning Nālanda, the *Memoirs* retain their official laconism; however, the picture they give of this great school is striking, and the following passage may be deemed interesting. It is one of the most remarkable pages of the *Memoirs*, and confirms all the previous information.

'The monks, who were several thousands in number,' says Hiouen-Tsang, or the editor of the *Si-yu-ki*, whoever

⁵⁸ Most interesting explorations have already been made in Magadha by Sir Francis Buchanan (Hamilton) in 1810, at the expense of the East India Company, and by Major Kittoe in 1847; but, for several reasons, these expeditions failed to produce the desired results.

he may have been, 'were all men of distinguished talents and deep learning. Several hundreds of them were esteemed by their contemporaries for their virtue, and their fame had spread to other countries. Their conduct was pure, and they faithfully followed the precepts of their discipline. The rule of this convent was extremely severe; moreover the multitude of monks conducted themselves with irreproachable discretion. The kingdoms of the Five Indias admired them and took them as models. Those who followed their teaching and discussed profound questions with them thought the days too short. From morning to night they mutually admonished one another, old and young striving to improve one another. Those among them who were incapable of treating the abstract matters of the Three Commentaries were held of no account, and were covered with shame. For this reason, foreign students desirous of acquiring fame came to this convent to dispel their doubts, and soon obtained the fame they sought. Even those who in travelling usurped their name received high honours. If a man of another country wished to enter and take part in the conferences, the custodian would first put him some difficult questions. The majority were reduced to silence and went away; for it was necessary to have a thorough knowledge of ancient and modern writings in order to obtain admittance. Consequently students who travelled in search of information had to debate at length to show their capacity; and seven or eight in every ten of the candidates were generally eliminated. If the remaining two or three seemed to be well informed, they were interrogated in turn by the whole Order, and their learning was put to the severest test. Only those who possessed real talent and vast erudition, a powerful memory, great capacity, high virtue and superior intelligence, might associate their glory with that of their predecessors, and follow in their footsteps.'

Here the *Memoirs* mention the names of some of the most learned monks of Nālanda, and add:

‘These men of eminent merit were known to all; by their virtue they surpassed their predecessors, and their knowledge comprised all the rules of the ancients. Each one of them had written about ten treatises and commentaries which were universally made use of, and which in their day were held in the highest esteem. Around the convents, a hundred sacred edifices might be counted. To be brief, we will only mention two or three.’

We will not follow Hiouen-Thsang in this description, which he makes much more lengthily than he had intended: we will not even follow him during the remainder of his travels throughout the peninsula. In the last three books, from the Tenth to the Twelfth, the traveller continues his journey down the banks of the Ganges, till he reaches the mouth of the river; he follows, more or less, the coast-line till he arrives at Kānchīpura; he then crosses the peninsula from east to west, and goes up again north-west to the Indus, returning through Hindu Kush and the northern kingdoms to the Chinese frontiers, at the extremity of the kingdom of Kustana. This immense round from Magadha comprises no less than sixty kingdoms which are fully described in the *Memoirs*.

The following passage shows the simple and touching style in which, after furnishing so many curious details, these *Memoirs* are brought to a conclusion.

‘We have made known,’ they say, ‘the mountains and rivers; described the lands, and portrayed the gentle or barbaric customs of the inhabitants, connecting them with the nature of the climate and soil. The behaviour of man is not everywhere uniform; his tastes and antipathies are not always the same. It has been a difficult matter to investigate thoroughly many of these facts, and it is impossible to write exactly about them from mere recollection. As the

traveller went through the different countries he wrote down a summary; he collected evidence furnished by his ears and eyes; and he faithfully noted down the people who wished to come under the rule of the Emperor of China.

'In the countries that witnessed his noble conduct everyone admired his perfect virtue. Can he therefore be compared to those men who start on missions with a single chariot and who post over a distance of a thousand *li*?' Such is the ending of the *Si-yu-ki*, or *Memoirs on the Western Countries*.

It is evident, by this last passage, that Hiouen-Thsang cannot have written in this manner about himself. Such an eulogy of his own virtue does not come from his own pen, and his modesty, which is revealed in so many ways, would never have permitted his indulging in such an ingenuous panegyric.

It has been seen that the *Memoirs* are richer than the *Biography* with regard to statistics, to history and geography. But, what is still more astonishing, they are also much richer in all kinds of legends. It is indeed difficult to imagine such blind, or rather foolish, credulity, as that shown by the Buddhists. As a general rule, in popular legends the extravagance of the matter is redeemed by a certain elegance of form and detail. Sometimes a delicate intention, vaguely hinted, atones for much that is trivial and foolish. But it is a peculiar and deplorable fact that in most of the Buddhist legends it seems impossible to discover any meaning; they appear to be mere aberrations of the mind, with nothing to compensate for their incomparable folly. It would be easy to quote a large number of these from Hiouen-Thsang's *Memoirs*; indeed they can be counted by hundreds.

The following specimens are taken at haphazard, or rather from among the first-mentioned at the beginning of his book. The grave historian had reached the kingdom of Kutch, not far from the mountains now called Musur-Dabaghan, and

near the Lake Temurtu, or Issikul. He has given, with Chinese exactitude, the dimensions both of this kingdom and its capital. He has described the climate and the produce of the soil; fertile in fruit, wheat, and minerals of all kinds. He has depicted the customs of the inhabitants, who are neither lacking in gentleness nor virtue, and who have even a certain taste for the fine arts. He recalls a curious custom which exists to the present day among these people—that of flattening the heads of the new-born children by pressing them under a board. The historian even goes further, and severely criticizes the king of that country, who is deficient in prudence as well as capacity, and is ruled by powerful ministers. Finally, he praises the convents, which are about one hundred in number, and in which he finds the monks subjected to a most strict discipline, and absorbed in the exercise of meritorious works.

It would seem that a narrative written in such a serious manner, and treating of actual facts, would hardly lead to Buddhist reveries. Suddenly, however, history gives place to the following legend:

‘To the north of a town situated on the eastern frontiers of the kingdom, there was in former days a great lake of dragons (Nāgahrada) in front of a temple to the gods. The dragons metamorphosed themselves and united themselves with mares. These brought forth foals which partook of the nature of the dragon. They were vicious, violent, and difficult to tame; but the offspring of these foal-dragons became gentle and docile. This is the reason why this kingdom produces such a large number of excellent horses.’

It is easy to perceive, even in this absurd legend, a trace of some real fact; and it would seem probably that the Kutch country, famed for its breed of horses, had been at some recent period ravaged by a horde of Tartars. But what an absurd interpretation! Where is the charm of so foolish a story? What is its hidden meaning? What ex-

planation does it give of a very simple and intelligible fact, which it pretends to supersede and embellish?

After this historical and national legend, we will quote a religious one.

Hiouen-Thsang finds a stūpa on the banks of a river. This stūpa had been built to commemorate a meritorious action of the Venerable of the Century. 'Formerly, in the days of the Buddha,' says Hiouen-Thsang, 'five hundred fishermen having formed an association, devoted themselves to netting the denizens of the river. One day, in the middle of the stream, they caught a large fish that had eighteen heads, each one of which had two eyes. As the fishermen were about to kill it, the Tathāgata, who was then in the kingdom of Vaisāli, with his divine sight perceived them. Filled with pity, he seized the opportunity to convert them, and open their hearts to the true belief. He therefore addressed the great multitude and said: 'In the kingdom of Vriji there is a large fish; I will lead it into the right path, in order to open the minds of the fishermen; you must learn all the circumstances.' Then the Tathāgata left the multitude at Vaisāli, raised himself into the air, and went to Vriji to the fishermen, whom he had seen from a distance of ninety miles. When he reached the banks of the river he urged the fishermen not to kill the fish, to whom he wished, he said, to open the path of happiness by revealing to it its former existence. The Buddha then interrogated the fish, giving it the power to reply in human speech, and inquired what crime it had committed in its former existence to have fallen so low and received such an ignoble body. The fish confessed his crimes with deep repentance. He had been a proud and insolent Brahman and had not respected the law of the Buddhas. But now he recognized his sin, and to reward him the Buddha caused him to be reborn in the palace of the gods. The fish, under this divine form, came to thank the Tathāgata, and, throwing himself at his feet,

moved respectfully round him, offering him celestial flowers of a delicious perfume. 'The Venerable of the Century,' continues Hiouen-Tsang, the faithful echo of tradition, 'the Venerable of the Century, gave this example as a warning to the fishermen, and explained the Good Law to them. Then, their hearts being opened, they showed him sincere respect and deep repentance. They tore up their nets, burnt their boats, returned to truth, and received the faith. After having clothed themselves in coloured garments and heard the noble doctrine, they renounced the corruption of the world, and obtained all the fruits of sanctity.'

It would be easy to quote any number of similar stories, but we must add that many other legends of a very different character may be found in Hiouen-Tsang's *Memoirs*, some of which are not only more rational, but also convey an exact idea of the facts they perpetuate.

In quoting Hiouen-Tsang as an historian it will be necessary to make a distinction between the facts he himself observed, and those he derives from more or less authentic traditions.

Of all these, the most important relates to the date of the Buddha's death, or the Nirvāṇa. What date does the Chinese pilgrim give, whether derived from the populations amongst whom he dwelt, or from the monuments he visited, or from the teachers of the Law who instructed him, and whose lessons he followed for more than fifteen years? It is well known that almost all Indian philologists agree in placing the date of the Buddha's death at 543 years before the Christian era. Thus the Nirvāṇa took place about twelve hundred years before Hiouen-Tsang's time, as he travelled from the years 629 to 645 of our era. But what was Hiouen-Tsang's own opinion, or rather what traditions did he find still subsisting in the places where the Buddha had lived, and where he died?

Hiouen-Tsang touches on the subject of the Nirvāṇa

on two occasions. The first time, he was in the kingdom of Kusi-nagara: he had crossed the Ajitavati river, at some distance from the capital, and on his way through a forest had come upon the four sāla trees of equal height, under which, it was said, the Tathāgata had drawn his last breath. In a neighbouring vihāra was a statue, representing the Tathāgata at the moment he entered Nirvāna; he was represented lying down, with his head turned to the north. Near this rose a stūpa two hundred feet high, and a stone column attributed to King Asoka. But Hiouen-Tsang sought in vain for any record of the year or month in which this great event had taken place. The two monuments were silent on this point, and in his pious solicitude he strives to supplement their silence. After stating that the Buddha remained on earth till the age of eighty, and that he quitted it, according to some statements, on the fifteenth day of the second half of the month of Vaisakha (April-May), and, according to others, in the second half of the month of Kārtika (October-November), he adds:

‘From the Nirvāna to the present day some people reckon twelve hundred years; others fifteen hundred; while others again affirm that more than nine hundred years have elapsed, but that certainly one thousand years have not yet been accomplished.’

Hiouen-Tsang does not deem it his duty to decide between these different opinions; he merely quotes them, and it would seem that he took the average estimation. This at least is the one he appears to adopt on a less solemn occasion, when he mentions for the second time the date of the Nirvāna. He was then in one of the kingdoms of Southern India Dhanakacheka?⁶⁰, and on the western side of the capital he visited a convent built on a mountain, by one of the former kings of the country, in honour of the Buddha. This convent, although a magnificent edifice, was

⁶⁰ *To-na-kie-tse-kia.*

deserted, and had remained uninhabited for a very long time. 'For a thousand years after the Nirvāna it had received a numerous throng of monks and laymen, but for the last hundred years (if we are to believe popular report) the spirits of the mountains had changed in their sentiments, and displayed so much violence and anger, that travellers, justly alarmed, no longer ventured near the convent, and this is the reason it no longer possesses either monks or novices.' Thus at the time Hiouen-Tsang visited this country, it was commonly believed that the Nirvāna had taken place eleven or twelve hundred years before.

It may therefore be considered that Hiouen-Tsang ascribes the same date as we do to the Buddha's death. This is an important fact, and if we recall all the uncertainty that still remains on this capital question, the information collected by Hiouen-Tsang is all the more valuable, as it concords with our own version.

Other evidence, no less important, is also forthcoming. There is not a detail in the well-known life of the Buddha that Hiouen-Tsang does not mention. From the most famous incidents of his childhood and youth, to the most decisive actions of his life, and to his death, the pious missionary has omitted nothing; for he found everywhere trace of these recollections in the stūpas and vihāras, on the columns and in the ruins of the cities, on the stones, on the hill-tops, and the trees of the forest. The birth and education of the Buddha at Kapilavastu, his visions at Lumbini, his flight from the paternal palace, his intimacy with Bimbisāra, his austerities at Bodhimanda, his first sermon at Benāres, his long sojourns in Magadha, Rājagriha, on the Vulture's Peak, and in the fertile domain of Anātha Pindika; the contests he sustained, the dangers he incurred, the conversions he made, the charity he exercised, the influence he wielded, his endless journeyings in neighbouring provinces, the circumstances of his death and funeral, the division of

his relics among eight kings—all this striking and simple story is brought back again before the traveller by the monuments he visits to pay him his homage.

For the learned world, the primitive history of Buddhism did not require this confirmation, but it may be said even now, without taking into account the discoveries which the future probably reserves, that there does not exist in the world another religion of which the origin has been better attested by undeniable evidence.

After the life of the Buddha and the date of the Nirvāṇa, the most important fact in the history of Buddhism is the meeting of the three Councils, who successively settled the canonical writings, and determined the orthodoxy of the official contents of the Three Commentaries, the *Tripitaka* (Three Baskets), which comprised the Sūtras, or the Discourses; the *Vinaya*, or the Discipline; and the *Abhidharma*, or the Metaphysics. These three Councils have been brought to our knowledge, first by the Sinhalese *Mahāvamsa*, of which Turnour has given both the text and a translation, and then by the Tibetan *Dulva*, of which Csoma Kōrōsi made a learned analysis. Nepalese tradition agrees with that of Ceylon (which is much more ancient) in placing the three Councils under the same princes. The only serious differences are about the reign of Asoka and the date of the third Council, which the Sinhalese place one hundred and fifty years earlier. This point has not been cleared up, and the history of the Assemblies of the Law and the Buddhist Councils has yet to be written. However that may be, the following information has been transmitted to us by Hiouen-Tsang.

He knew of three Councils—one that was held immediately after the death of Sākya-muni; a second one under Asoka; and a third under Kanishka, king of Kashmir. On the first one he dwells at great length. According to tradition, which he repeats, it was not far from Rājagriha, two

miles from the bamboo grove at Kalānta, in a large house situated in the midst of another wood, that the Arahats of the first Council assembled. Kāśyapa, who had chosen them—they numbered nine hundred and ninety-nine—directed the labours from which sprung the *Tripitaka*, and he presided over the learned assembly. Hiouen-Thsang shows him as exercising a kind of supervision, admitting some, excluding others as unworthy, and only receiving Ānanda himself on the condition of his performing a long penance. They had been in retreat for fifteen days, when Kāśyapa made Ānanda take the chair, inviting him to read the *Sūtra-Pitaka*, or Commentary on the Sūtras. The assembly, who respected the profound knowledge of Ānanda, which had been recognized by the Tathāgata himself, received the Sūtras from his lips, and wrote them down under his dictation. Then Kāśyapa ordered Upali to read the *Vinaya-Pitaka*, or Commentary on the Discipline; after which he himself read the *Abhidharma-Pitaka*, or Commentary on Metaphysics. At the end of three months the work of the Council was finished. The writings of the three Commentaries were collected; Kāśyapa had them transcribed on palm-leaves, and sent them out all over India. As he had presided over the monks, his school was called the School of the President (*Sthavīra-Nikāya*).

Those, however, who had been excluded from the Council by Kāśyapa's severity, assembled at a place near there. They numbered several thousands, laymen as well as monks, and, basing themselves on the principle of equality that had always been inculcated by the Tathāgata among his disciples, they deemed themselves in a fit state to make their own Collection of Sacred Writings. This they composed of Five Commentaries, first the three first, then a collection of miscellanies, and a collection of Magic Formulas. This second school was called the School of the Great Council (*Mahā-*

Samgha-Nikāya), and its partisans became celebrated under the name of Mahāsamghikas.

Hiouen-Thsang is much briefer about the second Council, which he only mentions in a cursory manner. It would seem from the somewhat confused details given, that it was not at Pāṭaliputra precisely, as is generally believed, that it was held, but near that city, in the convent of the Cock (Kukkuṭārama). It is all the more regrettable that Hiouen-Thsang should not give more particulars about this assembly, that he seems to have taken from some *Historical Memoirs* on Asoka the facts he does mention. This king, who probably ruled over the whole peninsula, had divided the Jambudvīpa into three parts and had given them to the Buddha, to the Law and the Order. He had also divided his riches in the same manner between the Three Gems. The *Historical Memoirs* Hiouen-Thsang consulted vouch for this. Did they also mention the Council convoked by Asoka? This would seem probable, but Hiouen-Thsang does not mention it. Moreover, his statement agrees with the Nepalese tradition in placing Asoka's reign, and therefore the date of the second Council, about one hundred years after the Nirvāṇa; and he states that Asoka was the grandnephew of King Bimbisāra.

He is a little more explicit about the third Council. Agreeing again with Nepalese tradition, he dates the assembly as taking place in the four hundredth year after the Nirvāṇa of the Tathāgata. According to his version, it is also the king of Kashmir, Kanishka, who convoked it, at the request of the ācharyya, Pārsvika. The assembly was composed of all the learned personages who had studied the Three Commentaries, besides the Five Luminous Treatises. They numbered five hundred, and were presided over by the famous Vasubandhu, the commentator of the *Abhidharmakośa*, the Treasure of Metaphysics. First, they collated the writings of the Three Commentaries, of which the canon had re-

mained unaltered, and they proposed elucidating the real meaning of these works, which had apparently become obscure. They therefore composed a work in one hundred thousand slokas called the *Upadesa-Sāstra*, to explain the Commentary on the Sūtras; then they composed one of a hundred thousand slokas, called the *Vinaya-vibāshā Sāstra*, to explain the Commentary on Discipline; and finally they composed a third work of another hundred thousand slokas called the *Abhidharma-vibāshā-Sāstra*, to explain the Commentary on Metaphysics. These three hundred thousand slokas contained nine hundred and sixty thousand words. The king Kanishka had these three works engraven on plates of copper, and sealed up in a stone box, over which he built a stūpa: 'If their deep meaning has been again brought to light,' adds Hiouen-Tsang, or rather his biographer, 'we owe it solely to the labours of this Council.' As Hiouen-Tsang remained two whole years in Kashmir, engaged in the most serious studies, and as 'for centuries learning had been held in high honour in this kingdom,' these traditions, which are moreover so precise, deserve particular attention.

As we have mentioned Asoka it may be as well to quote all the information Hiouen-Tsang gives us about him. Asoka, it would seem, was not born in the Buddhist faith, but as soon as his mind was opened to the belief, he resolved to build stupas all over India, to display, at the same time as his power, the fervour of his munificent piety. It is difficult to believe, notwithstanding tradition, that these stūpas numbered eighty-eight thousand, but Hiouen-Tsang asserts that he saw with his own eyes monuments attributed to this potentate from the capital of Nagahāra, at the foot of the Black Mountains of the Hindu Kush, down to the kingdom of Malakūta, at the southern extremity of the peninsula; and from east to west, from the kingdom of Tāmralīpti to the borders of Sindh and even the Persian frontiers. It is therefore extremely probable

that Asoka, who convoked the second Council, reigned over almost the whole of India, and that his authority was recognized by the multitude of small States which before his time and after him were divided into separate kingdoms. This is an historical fact that has a certain importance in the annals of India, and which therefore admits of no doubt.

In another respect, this would lead us to believe that the Piyadasi of the religious and moral Inscriptions is, as Turnour maintains, one and the same as the great king Asoka. These pious Edicts, which commended to the people the observance of the Law of the Buddha, have been discovered, repeated in indentical terms, on columns and rocks, in countries far distant from each other, and this circumstance alone would prove that the devout monarch who promulgated them ruled over almost all India. This is another point of resemblance between Hiouen-Tsang's Asoka, and the Asoka of the Inscriptions. Chronology, according to our present knowledge, opposes insurmountable difficulties in the identification of these two; but it is very possible that with fresh discoveries these difficulties will disappear.

It has therefore been seen, that in the days of Hiouen-Tsang the whole of India was divided into a multitude of small principalities, each distinct and independent of one another.

Nothing in the traveller's narrative reveals the cause of this political partition, which seems to have existed from a remote period. Sometimes it might be explained by differences of race, or natural obstacles that impose definite limits to provinces. But, generally, there is no such reason, and States are isolated from each other, although nothing exists in the nature of the soil, customs, language, beliefs, or races to divide them. Doubtless all these small local administrations had their reason for existence, but history does not give the reason, though it was powerful enough

to have created agglomerations, if not nationalities, which time has not destroyed, and which have preserved their autonomy, notwithstanding all the convulsions that have agitated the peninsula.

The most powerful prince whom Hiouen-Tsang met with was *Silāditya*, the king of *Kanyākubja*. He had no less than eighteen tributary kings under his rule; and on solemn occasions, as for instance, the contest between the Great and Little Vehicle, he made them accompany him. However, in spite of all his power, *Silāditya*, even with the help of his vassals, had not been able to conquer *Mahārattha*, that is, the country of the *Maharattas*, situated in the centre of India. Even at that remote period, this warlike race, which was the last to submit to the English rule, knew how to defend its liberty, and protect its frontiers from all invaders. The picture Hiouen-Tsang gives of them conveys a high idea of the qualities of this people. '*Silāditya* led his victorious armies from east to west,' says Hiouen-Tsang, 'and the most distant nations tremblingly obeyed him. But the men of this kingdom never submitted to his laws. Although he had placed himself at the head of all the troops of the five Indias, and called under his standard the bravest generals of the States he led into combat, he had not yet succeeded in overcoming their resistance; this will show their unyielding character and indomitable valour.'

A still more remarkable fact was that, notwithstanding their warlike temperament, the *Mahrattas* were passionately devoted to study; and this testimony the traveller readily gives them, although he is not lavish of it; in fact, he only bestows it upon three or four races: those of *Kashmir*, *Magadha* and *Malwah*. The Great and Little Vehicle were both followed in *Mahārattha*, where several hundreds of convents existed, containing about five thousand monks. The two sects lived there in harmony, and the heretical

Brahmans were almost as numerous as the Buddhists. This happy country was particularly favoured: its fertile soil produced corn in immense quantities, the climate was mild and the heat moderate. The inhabitants were simple and gentle in their habits, lived in comfort, and were in general tall of stature and possessed of singular strength.

Silāditya, king of Kanyākubja (Central India), had succeeded his elder brother, who had perished a victim to the treachery of a neighbouring prince jealous of his military talents.

He devoted himself to the happiness of his people; like his ancestors he belonged to the caste of the Vaisyas; and doubtless this humble origin inspired him with greater sympathy towards the inferior classes. He forbade throughout his dominions the slaying of a single living being, and allowed no meat to be consumed. Full of zeal for the Buddhist faith, which his family had professed for many generations, he had founded convents at all the places where the saints had left traces of their passage; and had magnificently endowed the great vihāra of Nālanda.

Silāditya's generosity was as great as his piety, and once a year he fed this multitude of monks during three or seven days. Besides this, every five years he assembled the Great Order of the Deliverance (*Moksha mahā parishad*), and distributed in alms all the riches of the royal treasury. Hiouen-Tsang does not hesitate to compare his beneficence to that of the famous Sudāna (Sudatta), the Anātha Pindika of the legends. This distribution of alms, not only to the monks but also to all the poorer classes of the population, is a characteristic institution of Buddhism, and one that has been retained.

The Buddha had not made this an absolute law for princes; but in recommending almsgiving as the chief virtue, he had strongly urged it upon them; and this singular custom partly replaced, in those remote days, the benefits of

the poor-laws in the present time. As Hiouen-Thsang personally assisted at one of these solemn distributions, and as his biographers have retained his account of it, we are able to know how it was carried out, and it is certainly one of the most curious spectacles afforded by Buddhism at that period.

It will be remembered that the Buddha had instituted public confession as an atonement for sin, and that the monks were obliged to make these painful and salutary confessions twice a month; at the new moon and at the full moon. From the monks this pious custom had extended to the whole body of believers; but, as such frequent gatherings would have been prejudicial to the working-classes and the multitude who had to gain their daily subsistence, the force of circumstances had somewhat modified the primitive institution. The people were assembled every three years, or at least every five years, in order that all might confess, and settle, as it were, all their past offences. Piyadasi's religious edicts leave no doubt on this point, and Hiouen-Thsang's testimony, relating what he himself witnessed, thoroughly confirms them. These assemblies were the natural opportunity for royal liberalities; but, little by little, the real meaning of the institution died out, confession was first neglected, then forgotten; and the gathering became but the occasion for giving and receiving sumptuous alms. This was what the Chinese pilgrim saw, and what he relates.

He was at that time in the kingdom of Prayāga, in Central India, one of the principalities that acknowledged the suzerainty of Śilāditya. Near the capital two rivers, the Ganges and the Jumna, united; to the west of their confluence rose a plateau, about four miles in circumference. From the days of antiquity, kings and high personages 'gifted with humane feelings' went to this place to bestow alms. It had therefore been called *the Great Plain of the Alms-giving*. According to tradition, it was more meritorious to give one coin at this place, than to give a hundred thousand

coins elsewhere. At all times it had been held in singular esteem; and the king *Silāditya*, in this a scrupulous imitator of his predecessors, had gone thither to perform the generous and sacred ceremony.

He first had a square space enclosed by a hedge of reeds, measuring a thousand feet on each side. In the middle several thatched halls were erected, containing an abundance of precious things, ingots of gold and silver, pearls, red glass, and rare gems of every kind. Other houses contained also a quantity of silk and cotton garments, gold and silver coins, &c. Outside the hedge an immense refectory was built; and as the distribution was to last a long time, a hundred houses, each capable of sheltering a thousand individuals, had been built in a straight row, like stalls in a market. Some time previous to the event, the king had summoned by decree all the *Sramanas* and heretic *Brahmans*, orphans and men without families, and the poor, in order that they might have their share in the distributions. Since the beginning of his reign he had already held five similar assemblies, this one was the sixth; and *Silāditya* specially invited *Hiouen-Thsang* to this festival in order that he might witness the happiness it promoted. The king arrived in great state, followed by his eighteen tributary kings, amongst whom were his son-in-law *Dhruvasena*, king of *Vallabhai* in Southern India, and *Kumāra*, king of Eastern India. Each of these kings had pitched his tent in different places, one to the north of the *Ganges*, the other to the west of the confluence, and the third to the south of the *Jumna*, by the side of a flowering grove. The men who had come to receive the alms numbered several hundred thousands, and were placed at the west of *Dhruvasena's* tents. Military forces accompanied the kings, and took up the positions assigned to them, ready if necessary to maintain order. Moreover, everything was carried out in a methodical manner.

Religion necessarily presided over these acts of great

beneficence. The first day a statue of the Buddha was installed in one of the thatched temples erected on the Place of the Almsgiving, and precious things and rich garments were distributed. Exquisite viands were served, and flowers were scattered around to the sound of sweet music. In the evening all retired to their tents. Thus the whole ceremony was placed under the protection of the Buddha, in whose name it was held. As at that epoch the people were as tolerant as they were pious, the second day they installed in another temple the statue of the Sun-god (Aditya) adored by the idolaters; but this time the distributions were only half of what they had been on the previous day. The third day the statue of the Supreme God (Isvara) was installed, and the same amount of alms were distributed as at the installation of the Sun-god. All the different religions practised by these nations were treated—except as to precedence—with the same respect; and as in ordinary life they co-existed without contest or persecution, the kings did not set them apart in their beneficence any more than they did in their protection.

On the fourth day the general distributions began, and they were first made to the monks, the fervent apostles of the Buddha's faith.

Then the distribution was extended to the Brahmans, and as they were much more numerous, it lasted twenty days. After them came the turn of the heretics, which took up ten days, and that of the naked mendicants (*nigranthas*) from distant countries, which lasted another ten days, lastly alms were given to the orphans, the poor, and men without families, which distribution took up no less than a month.

The seventy-five days assigned to the distribution had now come to an end. All the wealth stored up during five years in the royal treasury was exhausted. The king had nothing left him but the elephants, horses, and weapons of war indispensable for the protection of his kingdom and

the punishment of those who might cause disturbance. Personally, he had given away in alms all he wore, the best part of his garments, his necklaces, earrings, bracelets, the wreath round his diadem, the pearls that adorned his neck, and the carbuncle that glittered in the middle of his tuft of hair, in fact he had divested himself of everything he possessed. After having exhausted all his riches, he begged his sister to give him a common worn-out garment, and having clothed himself with it, he worshipped the Buddhas of the ten regions, and in a transport of ecstasy he joined his hands, exclaiming: 'In collecting all these riches and costly things, I constantly feared that I should not be able to conceal them in a safe and impenetrable place. Now that I have been able to deposit them in the *Field of Happiness*, I consider them safe for ever. I wish in all my future existences thus to collect wealth in order to give alms to men, and obtain the ten divine faculties in all their plenitude.' Some time after this, the eighteen tributary kings collected large sums of money from the people of their States and bought back the magnificent necklace, the carbuncle of his head-dress, the regal vestments, &c., that the king Silāditya had given in alms, and brought them back to him as an offering. But in a few days the king's raiment and the jewels of greater value were again bestowed in alms, like the first time.

This is Hiouen-Tsang's account; and he did not merely repeat what he had heard; he had seen what he relates, and it would be difficult to refute his assertions. He may have exaggerated certain details, and the distributions of alms may have been somewhat less abundant than he says, but the principal points of his narrative must be true; he most formally attests the existence of a custom created by religion, and maintained by the social condition of these enslaved and unhappy people not only in one part but over the whole of India. The Law of the Buddha enjoined almsgiving, and

political reasons no less urgently dictated it. It would have been dangerous for the sovereigns not to have returned in gifts a part of the riches they extorted by taxation from their subjects, and it would have inevitably roused to despair and rebellion the impoverished masses who readily submitted to their rulers provided they were given a bare subsistence. Prudence therefore came to the aid of piety, and the kings, while deeming that by almsgiving they were securing a place in the Tushita heaven, secured also for themselves a peaceful and durable authority.

What is still more astonishing is the general tolerance of both princes and people. Hiouen-Tsang only mentions one or two kings who had tried to overthrow Buddhism in their States. If Saṣangka, king of Karnasuvarna in Eastern India, 'abolished the Law, and destroyed the Tree of Wisdom,' the majority of the sovereigns display on the contrary great forbearance, and it would not seem that any of them had ever thought of coercing their subjects in the matter of their religious beliefs.

This spirit of toleration cannot be ascribed either to reason or to indifference, for the Buddhist nations were too ignorant of justice and devoid of intelligence; while on the other hand it cannot be ascribed to indifference, as their religious fervour is shown by the quantity of monuments they have raised in honour of their faith. Cities lay in ruins, their walls crumbled to pieces, while the stūpas and vihāras still remained standing; nothing, indeed, seemed to foreshadow the downfall of this religion, for new sacred edifices were constantly being built. They fervently believed the ancient dogmas; they sincerely respected tradition, however strange it might be; their hearts were warm, and nevertheless they remained tolerant towards other and even antagonistical beliefs. We can therefore only state this fact without explaining it; and the Indian mind in general, even more than the Buddhist, deserves all credit, for it must be re-

membered that the Brahman were as kindly towards their adversaries as the latter were to them. In all the ancient history of Brahmanism there is not a single record of a religious persecution. The Buddha, although a reformer, had in this faithfully imitated Brahmanism, and he never, in the whole course of long career, dreamt of turning the influence of the princes who protected him against his religious antagonists. He was satisfied with contending against them by doctrines which he considered superior to theirs; but he never tried to use compulsion, and the whole spirit of the new faith held violence in abhorrence.

In Hiouen-Thsang's time this happy state of things remained unaltered, and the struggle that was to lead to the expulsion of Buddhism had not yet begun. What was the condition of Buddhism in India in the middle of the seventh century of the Christian era, and what does the precise and devout pilgrim tell us on this subject? He will doubtless not give us all the information we should wish; but on the religious worship and the different sects he will furnish us with many details that will greatly interest us, although their ingenuous puerility may sometimes excite a feeling of contempt.

CHAPTER III

AT the time of Hiouen-Thsang's travels in India Buddhism had already existed for twelve hundred years, and during that long period the form of worship had not varied; for it had retained its simplicity, although superstition had increased with the legends. The images of the Buddha and his relics were still worshipped, as well as the monuments which contained them, or which had been erected on the spots sanctified by the presence of the Reformer. Flowers were scattered and perfumes burnt before the statues, offerings of silver and precious things were made to them, the stūpas were piously visited, and prayers, either mental or improvised for the occasion, were recited; prostrations and claspings of hands as tokens of respect were still made use of; and on solemn occasions, public worship was accompanied by music. The ceremonial, however, remained the same as at the outset, simple and inexpensive. Buddhism addressed itself exclusively to the hearts and minds of the faithful, and disdained external pomp; and sacrifices, which by all the minutiae of its exercises held such an important place in the Brahmanic religion, had completely disappeared in the religion of the Tathāgata.

As the Buddha had never claimed to be a god, it is evident that he never prescribed the form of worship that was to be rendered to him. A legend, however, attributes to him the institution of this form of worship, which it relates in the following manner.

'Rudrāyana, king of Roruka, had sent Bimbisāra, king of Rājagriha, a magnificent suit of armour endowed with miraculous virtues. Bimbisāra, not knowing how to requite such a valuable gift, consulted the Buddha, who at that time was at his court: "Let the image of the Tathāgata be drawn

on a piece of cloth," replied Bhagavat, "and send it as a present to Rudrāyana." It will be seen that this advice shows little humility on the part of the Buddha, and nothing in Sākya-muni's life authorizes a belief of such conceit. But the legend quietly ignores this; the Tathāgata therefore casts his shadow upon a cloth, and orders the painters to fill in the outline with colours, and to inscribe under the portrait the Formulas of Refuge and the Precepts of his teaching, not omitting to trace, both in its direct and inverse order, the Connective Chain of Converse Causes of existence. Rudrāyana respectfully receives this inestimable gift, and worships it with deep veneration, as Bimbisāra had instructed him to do in a previous letter announcing his present.

Such is, according to the legend, the origin of the form of worship. Only, in course of time, and by the very force of circumstances, statues were substituted for the less durable pictures, and they play an important part in Buddhism. They are extremely numerous, and often of an enormous size. The statues generally represent the Tathāgata in the attitude of meditation or rather of teaching: the right arm is uplifted and the gesture of the hand is that of a master speaking to his disciples. They bear all the marks that are visible of the thirty-two signs pertaining to a great man, and which tradition ascribed to the Buddha. These statues figured in great pomp on all occasions to which a solemn or religious character was attached.

This did not, however, constitute idolatry; but the merits these statues possessed, by preserving the image of the Buddha, and recalling his holy presence, were not the only qualities they were endowed with; superstition attributed to them many others better calculated to strike the imagination. Nothing is more common in the legends than statues that move or fly through space from far distant places. Near Purushapura in Gandhara (Peshāwar) Hiouen-Thsang saw a stūpa which, although in ruins, still measured 150 feet

high, it had been built by King Kanishka. A hundred spaces south-west of this stūpa, was a white stone statue of the Buddha, eighteen feet in height, with its face turned to the north. 'At this spot,' says Hiouen-Tsang, 'a great number of miracles take place; and the statue is often seen to move, during the night, round the great stūpa.'

Thus the pilgrim speaks of this prodigy, as if it could still be seen in his day. He does not, indeed, boast of having seen it himself, but it is probable that with a little more fanaticism he would have witnessed it, like so many other believers.

The miraculous appearance of two statues of the Buddha had formerly converted the kingdom of Kustana. One statue had come to Kashmir through the air, in answer to the prayers of a former king, who had gone to meet it at the head of his army. The statue had followed the monarch for some time, but when it reached the city of *Po-Kia-I* (Pogai?), it had stopped. In vain did the king unite his efforts to those of his soldiers to move it; no human power was able to dislodge it. They therefore erected a small chapel over the statue. The king had given his cap, enriched with precious stones, to adorn the head of the Buddha; and Hiouen-Tsang gazed at the ex-voto with an admiration that was shared by all those who were admitted to see it. The story of the second statue was no less extraordinary; it had come at the prayer of another king, and had placed itself in a convent, on a throne prepared to receive it; and it was—so the Chinese pilgrim was informed—the very same image that the Buddha had left to his disciples with the sacred writings.

Some of the Tathāgata's statues were endowed with miraculous powers. In the city of Pimo (Bhīma?) about sixty miles east of the capital of Khotan, Hiouen-Tsang saw a statue thirty feet high, representing the Buddha standing; it was remarkable for the beauty of its shape, and its serious

and stern attitude. It was supposed to effect infallible cures in favour of those who invoked Bhagavat. When a man was ill, a leaf of gold was stuck on the statue at the spot corresponding to the seat of pain in the man, and he was immediately cured. Moreover, the vows and petitions made to this statue were nearly always crowned with success.

As the statues of the principal Buddhist personages also received the homage of the faithful, Hiouen-Tsang relates the visit he devoutly paid to Avalokitesvara's statue in the kingdom of Hiranyaparbata. It was placed in a vihāra on the summit of a mountain, and was made of sandal-wood. It was also the object of pious pilgrimages; at all times a numerous throng gathered around it to worship it, after severely fasting for a week or two. A balustrade kept the faithful at a proper distance, and as the statue could not be touched, the flowers offered it were thrown from afar. If the garlands that were respectfully thrown at it settled on the hands or arms of the statue it was considered a good omen.

'The Master of the Law bought therefore all kinds of flowers and wove them into garlands, then, when he got near the statue, he worshipped the Bodhisatwa in all the sincerity of his heart and celebrated his praise. After which, turning to his image, he bowed low before it, and addressed to it the three following petitions: 'After having studied in India I wish to return to my native land, and live there in perfect tranquillity, far from all danger. As an omen of success I ask that these flowers may settle on your venerable hands. Secondly, as a consequence of the virtue I cultivate and the wisdom I aspire to, I desire to be born one day in the heaven of the Tushitas and serve Bodhisatwa Maitreya. If this be granted, I pray that these flowers may settle on your venerable arms. Thirdly, the holy doctrine teaches us that in the multitude of men of this world, some are in no ways gifted with the nature of the Buddha; I, Hiouen-Tsang, have doubts about myself, and I do not know if I am one of these.

If therefore I possess within me the nature of the Buddha, and if, by the practise of virtue, I can in my turn become Buddha, I beg that these garlands of flowers may settle on your venerable neck.' Saying this, he threw the garlands of flowers, and each one settled according to his wishes. Then, having obtained all he desired, he gave way to a transport of joy. At this sight, the persons near him, who like him had come to worship the statue, and the guardians of the vihāra, clapped their hands and beat the ground with their feet in token of their admiration. 'If at a future time,' they said, 'you attain the state of a Buddha, we ardently hope that you will remember this event, and make us pass among the first (to the other shore, that is to say, to Nirvāna).'⁶⁰

The worship of relics was as widespread and almost as fervent as that of the statues. It will be remembered that after the death of the Buddha, his relics had been divided in eight parts, amongst as many kings, who contended for them. As the body had been burnt, these relics could hardly consist of anything but ashes. But popular superstition easily transformed and multiplied them. In the days of Hiouen-Thsang, the *che-li*, as he calls them in Chinese (*sarīras*, body, in Sanskrit), were very numerous, and he found some in almost every part of India. He was able even to take back a collection of them to China, as well as statues.

It is easy to comprehend that *sarīras*, that is, fragments of the actual body of Sākya-muni, were the most holy relics; but they were not the only ones. In the kingdom of Naga-rahāra, besides the eyeball of the Buddha, and the bone of his cranium (*usnisha*), his garment and staff were preserved; at Baktra, besides one of his teeth, his water-jug and broom

⁶⁰ See Stanislas Julien, *Histoire de la vie et des voyages de Hiouen-Thsang*, p. 172.

were shown; at Kongkanapura, at the other extremity of the peninsula, the statue of Siddhārtha, prince royal (*Kumāra rāja*), and his cap were treasured up; doubtless it was the one he gave Chandaka, when he left the paternal palace; this cap was about two feet high. At each festival it was taken from the box where it was carefully locked up and placed on a high pedestal. 'Many of those who contemplate it,' adds Hiouen-Tsang, 'and worship it in perfect faith, have seen it surrounded by an extraordinary light.' It is the same with those who, gazing at the imprints which the Buddha's steps have left in many places, see these traces either long or short according to the virtue they themselves possess, and especially according to the fervour that animates them. At this rate miracles are easy, and the excited imaginations of believers can produce as many as they wish.

Amongst the personal relics, the teeth play the most important part. Hiouen-Tsang saw a dozen of them in the different parts of India he travelled over, and he asserts that his protector, King Śīlāditya, was on the point of undertaking a war against the king of Kashmir because he had refused to give him one of the Buddha's teeth. This one, although much shorter than many others, was an inch and a half long, it was of a yellowish white colour, 'and at all times emitted a bright light,' if we are to believe the devout missionary, who was allowed to contemplate it in the convent where the pious king had deposited it. There was another no less famous in the king's palace in Ceylon.

The footprints of the Buddha are almost innumerable; as the Tathāgata, according to tradition, visited the greater part of the peninsula; and the credulity of the faithful as well as the trickery of the monks greatly assisted in making them visible. These marks were usually imprinted on stones, and the most famous were those on Adam's Peak in the island of Ceylon, where the Buddha had certainly never

gone. It was called Sripada, or Prabhāt, that is, the Blessed foot.

The king Asoka was said to have raised stūpas at all the places where the Buddha had left traces of his footsteps, and it will therefore be easily understood how tradition had made these stūpas attain the number of eighty-four thousand; they were also called the eighty-four thousand Edicts of the Law.

At the side of the worship of the Buddha, by a deviation easy to understand, the worship of the principal disciples, and even that of personages famous by their virtue and knowledge, had followed that of the Buddha himself. Thus at Mathurā, in Central India, Hiouen-Tsang found stūpas in which had been deposited the relics of Rāhula, the son of Sākya-muni and of Ananda, his cousin and faithful adherent, who compiled the Sūtras of the first Council; and those of Upali, who compiled the Vinaya at the same Assembly, of Moggallāna, of Sariputra, of Pūrnamaitrāyanīputra, the first disciples of Tathāgata, and of Mañjuśrī, a no less celebrated ascetic, though he lived some centuries later. Every year, on feast days, the monks assembled in great number, and each one made offerings to the saint who was more particularly the object of his devotion. The votaries of the Abhidharma made offerings to Sāriputra, and those who gave themselves up to meditation (the Dhyāna ecstasy) made them to Moggallāna. The partisans of the Sūtras paid homage to Pūrnamaitrāyanīputra; and those who studied the Vinaya honoured Upali. The nuns, the Bhikṣunis, specially honoured Ananda. The faithful who had not yet received all the rules of discipline honoured Rāhula. Lastly, those who studied the Great Vehicle honoured all the Bodhisatvas without distinction.

As for Hiouen-Tsang, he appears to have felt a special reverence for the Maitreya Bodhisatwa. When the boat in which he was descending the Ganges was surprised by

pirates, and his life threatened by the ruffians, who dragged him to the altar on which they were about to sacrifice him, he addressed his prayers to Maitreya and not to the Buddha; on him alone does he energetically concentrate his thoughts; it is this Bodhisatwa whom he sees appear in the ecstasy into which his spirit is plunged at this supreme moment, and it is to the all-powerful intervention of this saint, that he attributes his deliverance. At the end of his career, when, at the point of death, he recalls to mind all the good deeds he has accomplished, and dictates a list of them to his sorrow-stricken disciples, he boasts that he has had a thousand images of the Maitreya Bodhisatwa painted; and his most ardent wish, at this moment when he is quitting life, 'is to be admitted into the family of Maitreya in Tushita, in order to serve this Buddha, so full of tenderness and affection.' The Gāthās he recites when dying are addressed to Maitreya; and at the very instant when his spirit is vanishing, he tells his disciples 'that he has at last obtained his wish to be born in the midst of Maitreya's Assembly.' Thus the simple Bodhisatwa Maitreya seems to hold as high a place as the Buddha himself in the worship of the learned missionary.

All these details clearly show the condition of Buddhist worship in the days of Hiouen-Tsang: it was a spiritual homage rendered in the first place to the holiness and virtue of the Tathāgata, and in the second to all those who had best followed his incomparable example. The worship was full of meekness and devoid of all costly state; it was accessible to the very humblest, since it only required prayers and flowers, and the faith that accompanied these modest offerings was deemed more precious than the offerings themselves.

No privileged class was entrusted with the pious exercises and ceremonies. The monks in holy orders, for this expression is applicable to them, did not form part of a

regular or general corporation, they were respected by the faithful, because they were thought to possess more knowledge and virtue than the common herd; but they did not exercise any official power. They appear to have been subject, in the rich convents and vihāras they inhabited, to a uniform discipline which dated from ancient times, but, numerous as they were, they were neither organized nor united under one common direction. Each vihāra or sanghārāma kept apart and had its own administration, just as each province retained its own government. Religion had not overcome the spirit of division, and there was no more spiritual than political unity. The separate and unstable supremacies that sometimes existed with regard to the land, had never been attempted with respect to religion. The common faith rested on the identity of the writings which were universally venerated; it was maintained by its own power and by tradition; but it did not require that vast hierarchy which has proved indispensable to other nations. This singular fact is borne out by Hiouen-Thsang's testimony, and the evidence from a different point of view—contained in the Sūtras. Pious foundations were flourishing everywhere, from Kashmir down to the extreme point of the peninsula. Created by the munificence of kings and the piety of believers, they were kept up by them and existed by their beneficence; they were as opulent as they were numerous, but it would not seem that the monks ever thought of uniting under one rule all these scattered elements, in order to constitute a power which would probably have proved irresistible.

This usurpation took place in the neighbouring states notably in Thibet, where the supremacy of the Grand Lama had established itself; but in India it was not even attempted, and the idea never seems to have occurred to any one.

Hiouen-Thsang gives us very few details about the

attitude of Brahmanism in the presence of its rival, which seems in general to have enjoyed an easy triumph.

The Brahmins with whom Siddhārtha formerly discussed discuss no longer, they are called heretics; the Vedas are classed amongst secular books, and they are henceforth so little feared, that they are studied in the convents on the same footing as philosophy, grammar, logic and medicine. This was doubtless a painful position for the old Brahmanic orthodoxy, but no symptom of revolt or persecution can be traced. History does not precisely state when Buddhism began; but, thanks to the evidence of the Chinese pilgrim, it may be considered certain that towards the middle of the seventh century Buddhism still enjoyed complete tranquillity in India.

It considered itself very superior to the ancient faith; in its eyes Brahmanism was but the gross worship of spirits and Devas. The Brahmanic Pantheon was completely discredited, and a belief in those strange and impotent divinities was regarded as a kind of shame. The Brahmins did not know how to create an ideal accessible to the masses, and their metaphysical speculations, which were perhaps excellent for ascetics and men of learning, were not addressed to the vulgar herd, and could not appeal to them. The ideal that Buddhism created was, on the contrary, intensely human; and if the virtue of the Tathāgata was infinitely superior to that of other men, it nevertheless served as a pattern and guide for them. This is shown by the example of Hiouen-Tsang and many others; he takes the Buddha as his model, and the recollection of his heroic and saintly life assists him to become, in a certain measure, a hero and a saint. From this point of view Buddhism might well disdain Brahmanism, which was less moral and above all less practical; and it is evident that it loses no opportunity of manifesting a contempt, which its adversaries seem often

to accept. The missionary saw Brahmans filling the meanest functions in the Buddhist temples.

Thus the religion of the Buddha does not appear to have been on its decline in India, when the pious Hiouen-Thsang went thither to seek the enlightenment which was fading in China. He found tradition alive everywhere, religious establishments flourishing and spread all over the country, which liberally maintained them; the most studious and learned teachers, a throng of disciples who diligently follow their lessons, in order to perpetuate them; in one word, a prosperous condition that seemed likely to continue for many centuries.

And what more particularly proves the power which at this epoch animated Buddhism, were the energetic controversies in which it was constantly engaged, both against its adversaries and in its own circle.

Buddhism was divided into two sects: that of the Great Vehicle, and that of the Little Vehicle, both of which could be traced back to the earliest days. Two hundred and twenty years before Hiouen-Thsang's journey, Fa-Hian had found them in the same situation. What differences separated them? And in what did their discussions exactly consist? This is a difficult question to solve; and hitherto it has remained obscure, although the Buddhist documents we possess quote at each instant the names of these two sects.

In the first place, the Great and Little Vehicle (*Mahāyāna* and *Hinayāna*) were exactly alike in the boundless faith they had in the worship of the Buddha. They had only a different manner of honouring the Tathāgata according as they studied his merits and doctrines in different works; but in reality they both believed only in him, and both sects possess the same fervour.

From a Chinese catalogue quoted by Stanislas Julien,⁶¹

⁶¹ *San-tchang-ching*, in some unpublished documents that Stanislas Julien communicated to the author.

it appears that the two Vehicles did not hold the same books as canonical and orthodox. The Great Vehicle had five series of sacred writings, while the Little Vehicle had nine.

The result of a comparison of these two lists of works is that the doctrine of the Little Vehicle is much less elevated than that of the Great Vehicle, as its name implies. And indeed Chinese authors generally admit, that the partisans of the Little Vehicle cannot attain Nirvāna, and are still subject to transmigration. They do not attain true metaphysics, but are content with the code of morals and discipline, to which they add the legends. This is evidently an inferiority which adherents of the Little Vehicle strive in vain to hide.

Moreover we see with what contempt Hiouen-Tsang—who belonged to the Great Vehicle—like nearly all the Chinese Buddhists, spoke of them. How often he extols the sublime precepts of the Great Vehicle, comparing them with scornful complacency to the narrow, mean views of the Little Vehicle, which to him seem incapable of ensuring eternal salvation. He purposely relates the legends that depreciate it, and never loses an opportunity of quoting any facts that may be prejudicial to it.

Notwithstanding this apparent inferiority of the Little Vehicle, that sect was as numerous as its rival in the peninsula in the days of Hiouen-Tsang. It existed in the kingdoms of Bamian and Kapisa in the north; in that of Kapilavastu, and even at Benāres; in the kingdoms of Hiranyaparvata and Champā in the east; in the kingdom of Malwah, which was considered the most enlightened after Magadha; in that of Vallabhi in the south; at Vaisāli in Central India; in Gurjara Guzerāt in the west, in Sindh and in many other places. It is true that the Great Vehicle generally predominated, and had in its favour the number of its adherents as well as the purity of its doctrines. But this does not make it less tolerant; and in many kingdoms

the two sects co-exist without excluding one or the other, and even without any great contest. Thus in Śīlāditya's dominions at Kanyākubja, the partisans of the Little Vehicle exercise their form of worship in complete liberty, as indeed the contest in which the Chinese pilgrim was triumphant would prove. And it was the same in the kingdoms of Pundravarddhana, Kongkanapura, Mahārattha (the country of the Mahrattas), Atali, Ayodhyā (Oudh), Mathurā, Udjayana (Udjein), &c. In all these countries the Little Vehicle is followed as much as the Great, and Hiouen-Thsang does not quote a single act of violence inspired by fanaticism.

The most learned and pious monks mutually refuted one another with unwearying zeal; but their animosity did not extend beyond their arguments, and when the dialectic tournament was ended, the two sects resumed their good understanding, which lasted till the next contest, where self-love was alone at stake. Nevertheless, as the two Vehicles have their own particular convents the sects do not mix in ordinary life, and do not willingly avail themselves of each other's hospitality. When Hiouen-Thsang reached the capital of the kingdom of Kapisa, one of his companions, who belonged to the Little Vehicle, showed a certain repugnance at staying in a convent of the Great Vehicle. The Master of the Law yielded to this susceptibility, by going himself to reside in a convent of the Little Vehicle, which had in former days been the residence of the son of a Chinese emperor, retained there as a hostage. The fact was that the two Vehicles had different rules with regard to the food of the monks. The Little Vehicle only permitted three kinds of food, which were called the *three pure foods*; and it forbade all other. The prohibition might, however, under certain circumstances be disregarded; and the monks of the kingdom of *A-ki-ni* (Agni), who were renowned for the severity and purity of their lives and their submission to

the laws of discipline, added some ordinary foods to the *three pure foods*. This excessive sobriety of the Little Vehicle was considered an error, perhaps because it recalled the dangerous austerities prohibited by the Buddha; and Hiouen-Tsang boasted to the king of Kutch, who received him in his palace, that he ate indiscriminately of every kind of food, leaving to the Gradual Doctrine, that is to say, the Little Vehicle, a practice which seemed to him both puerile and culpable. As the Little Vehicle was less esteemed, it frequently happened that it was abandoned for the superior doctrine; Hiouen-Tsang gives several such examples. It was thus that the famous Vasubandhu of Gandhara, imitating his master Asamgha, had passed from the schools of the Little Vehicle to those of the Great Vehicle, where he had become one of the greatest authorities. A whole convent in Magadha had been converted by the miraculous gift of a wild goose; which fell from the skies at the feet of the bursar, who on that day had found himself in great difficulties to provide for the monks' repast, as they could only eat the three pure foods.

Sometimes the change was made in the opposite direction; and as it was possible to be very learned although a partisan of the Little Vehicle, the Great Vehicle was abandoned, on account of its somewhat obscure theories, which appealed less vividly to the imagination. At the gates of the capital of the kingdom of Matipura, Hiouen-Tsang saw a stūpa consecrated to the memory of Gunaprabha, the author of numerous works, who, after having studied the Great Vehicle had left it and joined the Little Vehicle. It is probable, however, that such cases were rare. No disgrace was, however, attached to the practice of the Little Vehicle, for those who prided themselves on possessing thorough knowledge, while giving the preference to the Great Vehicle, studied indiscriminately both of them.

Not far from the learned convent of Nālanda, Hiouen-

Thsang found on a mountain, called the Forest of Staffs, an ascetic renowned for his learning, whose teaching he diligently followed for two years. He was a Kshatriya who in his youth had displayed a great taste for study, and who, renouncing his caste, had become a Buddhist. He possessed a thorough knowledge of secular works, or books from outside as they were called; of the four Vedas, of works on astronomy, geography, medicine, magic, and arithmetic: but besides these he knew the Great and Little Vehicles, although he was a disciple of Sīlabhadra, the venerable superior of the Convent of Nālanda.

Hiouen-Thsang himself, in a letter of thanks which he wrote to the king of Kao-Tch'ang, after obtaining his release, boasts that he is acquainted with the two Vehicles, and expresses himself in the following manner: 'Hiouen-Thsang, thanks to his happy destiny, entered at an early date through the Black Gate (into a convent), and followed the master's teachings till he was about twenty years of age. All the illustrious sages and friends of a superior merit were consulted, and interrogated by him. He studied thoroughly the precepts of the Great and Little Vehicle.' Later, when Hiouen-Thsang, who had written a treatise expressly to refute the errors of the Little Vehicle, returned to China, laden with the sacred treasures he had gone to seek in India, he took back with him the works of the Little Vehicle, which, although less precious, were almost as numerous as those of the Great Vehicle; and in his long retreat he translated both of them with equal care, if not with equal respect. During all his sojourn in India he had impartially studied the two Vehicles, under the guidance of the most authorized masters.

It would not seem, however, that the ancient doctrines of Brahmanic philosophy were quite extinct at the time when the Chinese pilgrim travelled through India. As he had an utter contempt for Brahmanism, he hardly notices it, nevertheless he was acquainted with it, and when duty required it,

he was able to refute it. It was thus that, before the great conflict with the partisans of the Little Vehicle at Kanyākubja, he engaged in a regular discussion with a Brahman upon different systems, and among others on that of the Sāṅkhya and the Vaiseshika. He analyzed them in order to demonstrate their absurdity. The arguments by which he thinks to overcome them may not appear very conclusive, but they at least prove that he had studied these theories, and that they were sufficiently prevalent for Buddhism to have to contend against them, even if it had no cause to fear them. The ancient philosophy therefore was not dead, and the Brahmans still cultivated it, although it possessed little life or influence.

Buddhism, on the contrary, was full of activity and energy. It would be difficult without the ample details furnished by Hiouen-Thsang, to have an idea of the important mental movement and enormous labour of which it continued to be the object. The monks, in all the viḥāras and saṃghāramas, zealously applied themselves to the writing of books, when they possessed sufficient talent and authority to speak in their own name, or else they applied themselves to the study of the works sanctioned by orthodoxy. Throughout all India, Hiouen-Thsang, learned as he was, found personages worthy to discuss with him on the most delicate points of the Law, and even capable of enlightening him. These personages were deeply venerated for their intelligence by all who came near them, from the kings who aspired to converse with them, down to the people who worshipped them as saints. They gloried in the number of books they had read; and the professors of the Law who could quote and comment on the largest number were considered the most illustrious and were the most revered. They mutually questioned each other on the meaning of obscure passages, and woe to him who could not answer; false science was unmasked, and vanity pitilessly punished by richly deserved humiliation. Not only did the monks in their studious retreats distinguish

themselves by these pious labours, but whole populations kept up and honoured the culture of letters, as for instance in Magadha and Malwah.

The Buddhist mind, which had no other food than the sacred writings, was exclusively given up to studying and explaining them; and these serious occupations sufficed to satisfy all the cravings of the heart and imagination. Sometimes indeed they might indulge in some momentary relaxation by the study of logic, astronomy, medicine, arithmetic or magic; but those profane pursuits were soon laid aside for the sole research needful, that of eternal salvation, which could only be acquired by meditating the Law of the Buddha and its boundless perfections.

In Hiouen-Thsang's time, that is about twelve hundred years after the death of the Buddha, the fervour of religious study and discussions had not slackened. The neighbouring countries, particularly those in the north, sought from India, the revered birthplace of the Buddha, the instruction it could alone impart, and which it liberally gave them. Hiouen-Thsang mentions over forty monks of his day whom he met, and whose teachings he followed or refuted in all the countries he travelled through.

Another course of studies about which Hiouen-Thsang also gives some curious and precise information, are the translations of the Buddhists' writings made in China, by monks who came from India. Under the reign of Fou-Kien, prince of Thsin from the year 358 to 383 of the Christian era, a certain Sramana called Dharmanandi translated the sacred books, and one of the Emperor's chamberlain's held the brush. From 397 to 415, another Indian Buddhist named Kumārajīva was the translator; and under the Second Wei dynasty, from 471 to 477, the translator was Bodhiruchi. Shortly before Hiouen-Thsang, in 627, an Indian professor, Prabhāratna, was entrusted with the translations, which one of the Emperor's ministers revised in

order to ensure their lucidity and elegance. Thus, during many centuries, did China apply to Buddhistic India for its interpreters of the Law, and India was always able to furnish them.

Hiouen-Thsang not only gives these details as to individuals, but he also furnishes details upon the works themselves.

Besides the Sūtras, he mentions a quantity of Sāstras, Kārikās and Tīkas, all secondary books, but still very important, as they develop, complete, and comment on the original documents of the faith. If we were not afraid of wearying our readers, we could name fully one hundred. Such was the learned and devout society amid which Hiouen-Thsang lived during sixteen consecutive years, in order to acquire the orthodox knowledge that he was desirous of carrying back to his own less enlightened country. We may indeed smile at the ingenuousness of the missionary, who took so much trouble to collect absurd legends and extravagant beliefs, but this does not diminish his merit. We must, however, admit that our astonishment surpasses our contempt, for we had no idea that, in the seventh century of the Christian era, India possessed convents as numerous as those of our Middle Ages; schools and monks as learned and as laborious as our own; vivid religious preoccupations, and a complete collection of sacred writings; documents of all descriptions, which attest and keep up the dogmas of its faith; and princes and nations so pious and at the same time so tolerant. We do not seek to compare the fertile chaos of our Western Continent—at that period—with Indian Buddhism such as Hiouen-Thsang reveals it to us; but we may well doubt whether any intelligent and courageous missionary, who might have come from distant countries to our own, would have received so cordial a reception, and, more especially, if he would have been able to make such an abundant harvest. He would have been strangely puzzled to find on the

Christian religion the 657 works the Chinese pilgrim was able to collect on the Buddhist faith; and when we see how small was the literary store in our most renowned schools, we may well consider that the Buddhist world studied its religion better than the Christian world did its own. It is true that it had already accumulated the labours of twelve hundred years, and that it had the whole Brahmanic system behind it; but western civilization had equal advantages, which it had neglected. Later, its destinies were to be much higher; but at that moment the Christian world was in a state of inferiority which its pride little suspected; and which even now it is reluctant to admit. However, in face of precise and undeniable documents like those of Hiouen-Thsang's travels, our civilization must recognize that if it has no rivals it has had at least equals, which deserve all its consideration and even sympathy, notwithstanding their deficiencies and mistakes. Buddhism has, like our own civilization, stirred up the greatest problems that the human intelligence can evoke. It has not, it is true, found the solution, but it is no small honour to have made the attempt, and this noble effort, sterile as it was, is well calculated to disarm severity and compensate for many faults.



